The Forever War

Volume 1: Private Mandella

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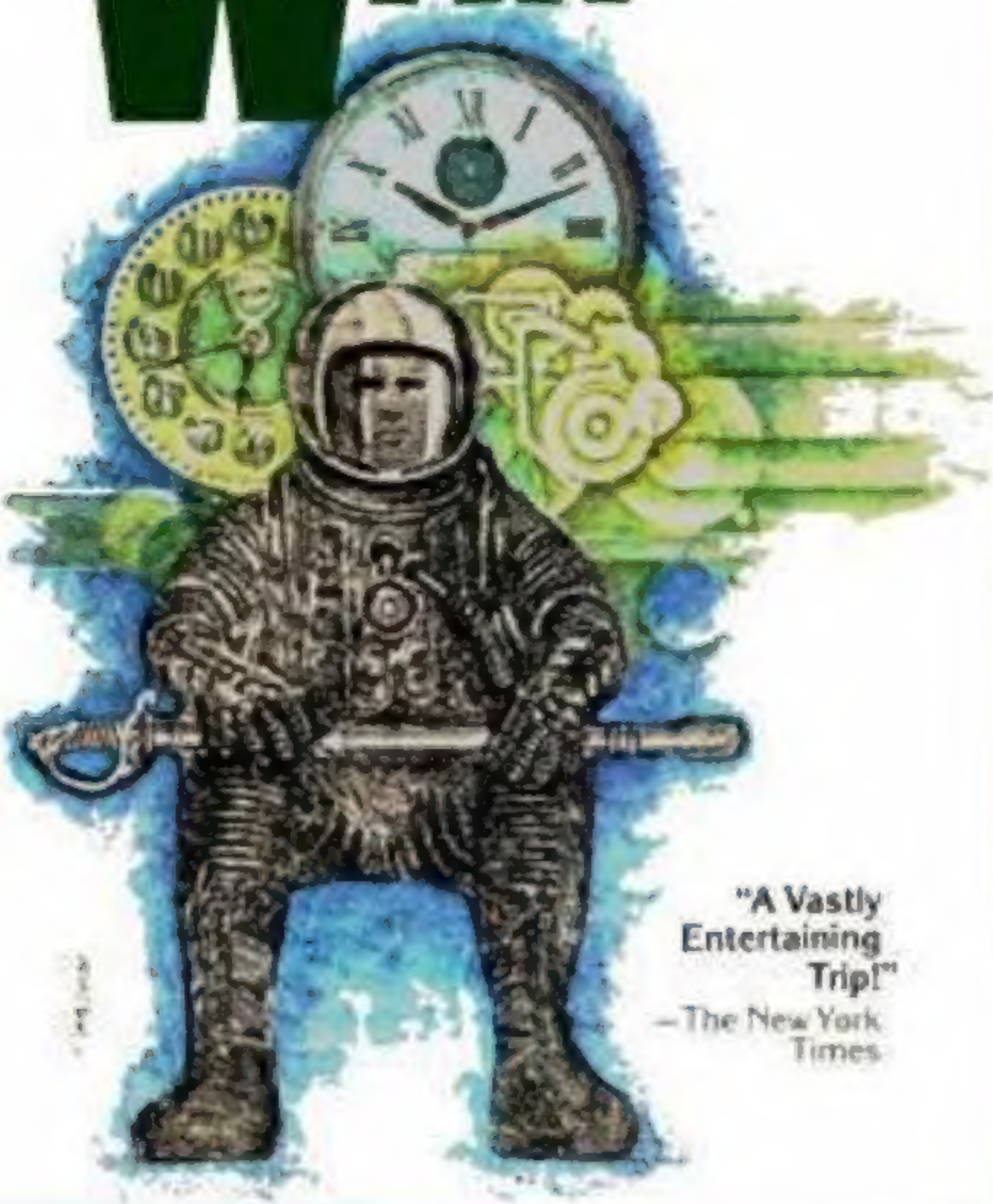
24767/$1.50

A DAZZLING & POWERFUL SCIENCE FICTION CATCH-22!

THE FOREVER WAR

JOE HALDEMAN

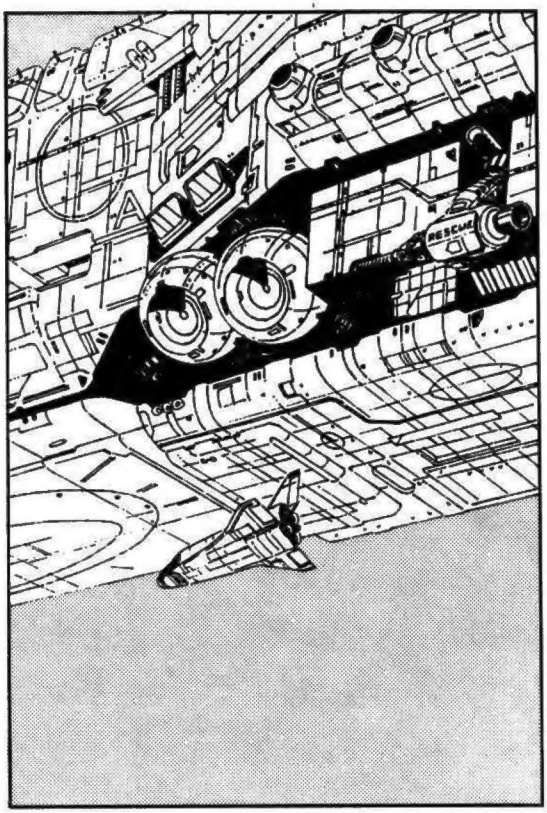


"A Vastly Entertaining Trip!"
—The New York Times

THE FOREVER WAR

BY

HALDEMAN & MARVANO



BOOK ONE

CHAPTER ONE

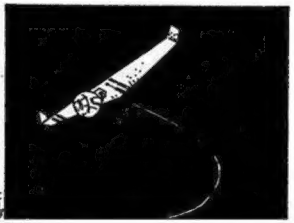
DEATH STRUCK ON THE THIRD DAY OF OUR INSTRUCTION ON CERBERUS.

WE WERE LEARNING TO DIG THE FROZEN GROUND OF THE GREEN PLANET. **BOVANOVITCH** HAD JUST SET SOME EXPLOSIVE CHARGES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE CRATER.

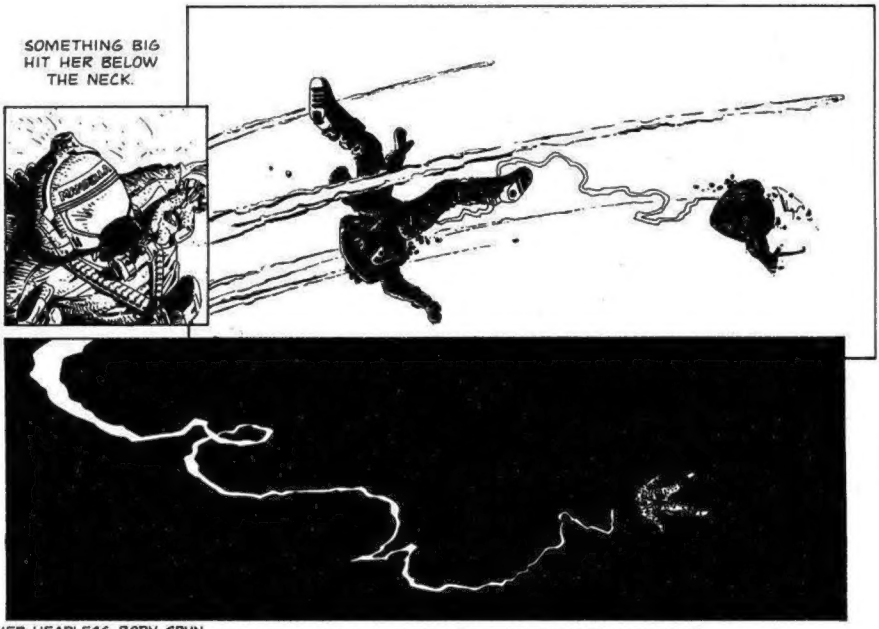
WE COULDN'T HELP HER ...NOT WITH A TWENTY MICROTON CHARGE ABOUT TO EXPLODE AT THE BOTTOM OF THAT HOLE. OUR INSTRUCTOR, SERGEANT CORTEZ DID WHAT HE COULD.

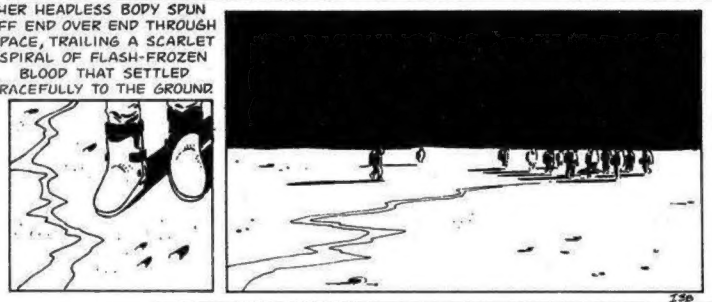
STAY CALM, SOLDIER. RELEASE YOURSELF CALMLY. YOU STILL HAVE TWO MINUTES LEFT. PUSH GODDAMMIT! YOU CAN MOVE A TON WITH EACH HAND!

HE CALLED BACK THE REMOTE-CONTROLLED CAMERA... WITH IT, WE COULD ANALYZE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE MISTAKE.



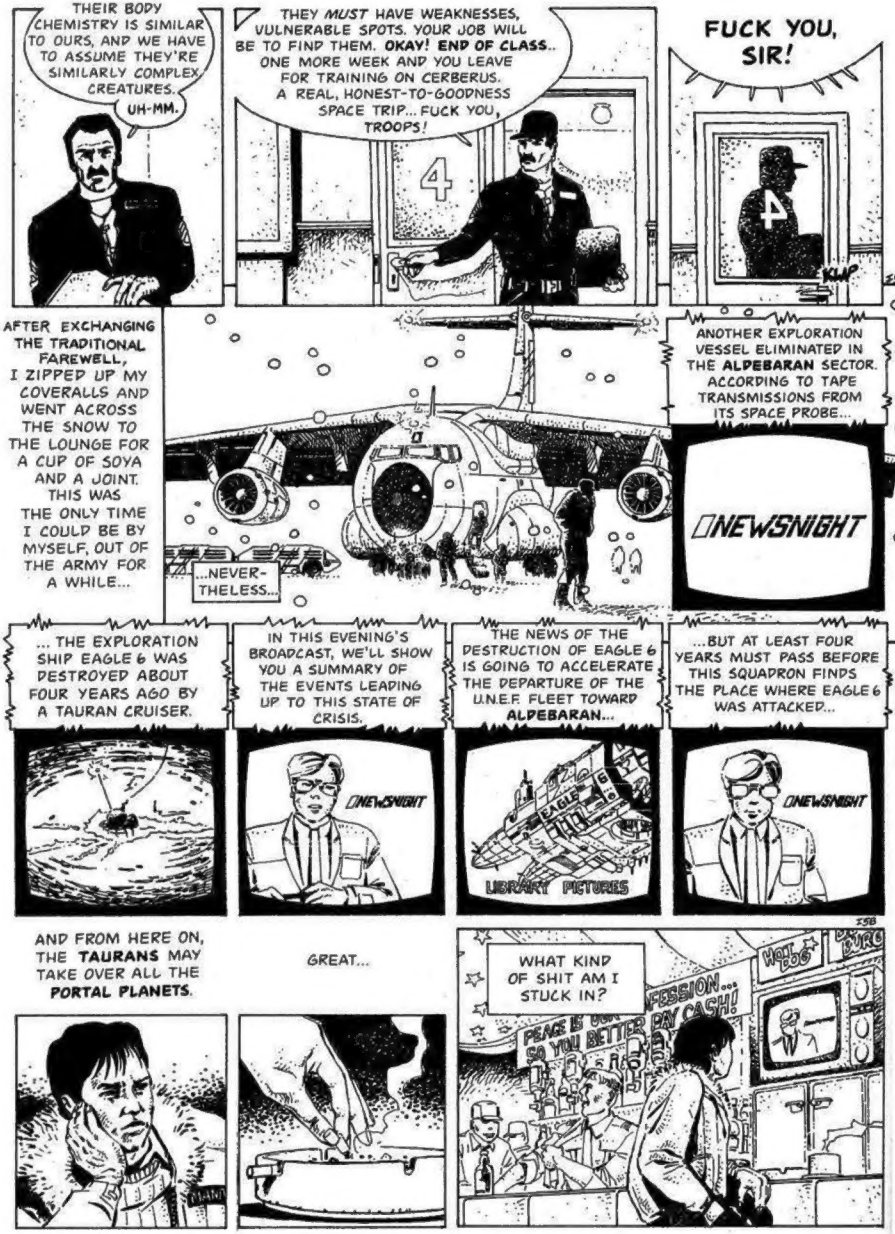
LESS THAN A MINUTE REMAINED WHEN SHE EMERGED FROM THE CRATER.
MANDELLA
RUN, GIRL! YOU BETTER RUN!
THIRTY SECONDS...
ALL RIGHT, BOVANOVITCH. GET DOWN ON YOUR STOMACH AND LIE STILL.
EVERYBODY DOWN!
TEN SECONDS, BUT, EITHER SHE DIDN'T HEAR OR SHE WANTED TO GET JUST A LITTLE MORE DISTANCE, AND SHE KEPT RUNNING.
BOVANOVITCH! NO!
SHE WAS IN FULL LEAP WHEN A FLASH BURST FROM THE CRATER...


SOMETHING BIG HIT HER BELOW THE NECK.


HER HEADLESS BODY SPUN OFF END OVER END THROUGH SPACE, TRAILING A SCARLET SPIRAL OF FLASH-FROZEN BLOOD THAT SETTLED GRACEFULLY TO THE GROUND.
WE FOLLOWED ITS TRACK: A TRAIL OF SCARLET CRYSTALLINE POWDER. AT THE END OF THE RED TRACK, WE GATHERED ROCKS TO COVER THE POOR THING THAT WAS LYING THERE.

THAT NIGHT CORTEZ DIDN'T LECTURE US; DIDN'T EVEN SHOW UP FOR NIGHT-CHOP. NOBODY WAS REALLY HUNGRY...

BOVANOVITCH...
I REMEMBERED HER IN THE CLASSROOM. QUIET BUT STUBBORN.
ALL RIGHT! THOSE WERE THE EIGHT SILENT WAYS TO KILL A MAN. ANY QUESTIONS?
YES, SIR. MOST OF THOSE METHODS, THEY LOOKED... KIND OF SILLY.
FOR INSTANCE, PRIVATE BOVANOVITCH?
KILLING A MAN WITH A SHOVEL BLOW TO THE KIDNEYS. WHEN WOULD WE HAVE ONLY A SHOVEL AS A WEAPON?
AND IN THAT CASE, WHY NOT HIT HIM OVER THE HEAD WITH IT?
HE MIGHT BE WEARING A HELMET.
THE OFFICERS HAD AN ANSWER TO ALMOST EVERYTHING.
WHAT IF THE **TAURANS** DON'T HAVE KIDNEYS?
NO ONE THEN HAD EVER SEEN A TAURAN; WE HADN'T FOUND ANY PIECES LARGER THAN A SCORCHED CHROMOSOME.
IT'S POSSIBLE...


THEIR BODY CHEMISTRY IS SIMILAR TO OURS, AND WE HAVE TO ASSUME THEY'RE SIMILARLY COMPLEX CREATURES.
UH-MM.
THEY MUST HAVE WEAKNESSES, VULNERABLE SPOTS. YOUR JOB WILL BE TO FIND THEM. OKAY! END OF CLASS.. ONE MORE WEEK AND YOU LEAVE FOR TRAINING ON CERBERUS. A REAL, HONEST-TO-GOODNESS SPACE TRIP... FUCK YOU, TROOPS!
FUCK YOU, SIR!
KLAP
AFTER EXCHANGING THE TRADITIONAL FAREWELL, I ZIPPED UP MY COVERALLS AND WENT ACROSS THE SNOW TO THE LOUNGE FOR A CUP OF SOYA AND A JOINT. THIS WAS THE ONLY TIME I COULD BE BY MYSELF, OUT OF THE ARMY FOR A WHILE...
...NEVER-THELESS...
ANOTHER EXPLORATION VESSEL ELIMINATED IN THE ALPEBARAN SECTOR. ACCORDING TO TAPE TRANSMISSIONS FROM ITS SPACE PROBE...
NEWSNIGHT
... THE EXPLORATION SHIP EAGLE 6 WAS DESTROYED ABOUT FOUR YEARS AGO BY A TAURAN CRUISER.
IN THIS EVENING'S BROADCAST, WE'LL SHOW YOU A SUMMARY OF THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO THIS STATE OF CRISIS.
THE NEWS OF THE DESTRUCTION OF EAGLE 6 IS GOING TO ACCELERATE THE DEPARTURE OF THE U.N.E.F. FLEET TOWARD ALPEBARAN...
...BUT AT LEAST FOUR YEARS MUST PASS BEFORE THIS SQUADRON FINDS THE PLACE WHERE EAGLE 6 WAS ATTACKED...
NEWSNIGHT
EAGLE 6
LIBRARY PICTURES
NEWSNIGHT
AND FROM HERE ON, THE TAURANS MAY TAKE OVER ALL THE PORTAL PLANETS.
GREAT...
WHAT KIND OF SHIT AM I STUCK IN?
PEACE IS
SO YOU BETTER
PAY CASH!
FESSION...

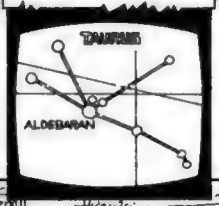
TYPICAL ARMY HALF LOGIC, HAVING US TRAIN IN THE COLD
SURE, IT WAS GOING TO BE COLD WHERE WE WERE GOING, BUT NOT ICE-COLD OR SNOW-COLD.
A PORTAL PLANET REMAINS WITHIN A DEGREE OR TWO OF ABSOLUTE ZERO.
MANDELLA
THE FIRST CHILL YOU FELT, YOU WERE DEAD.
THE COLLAPSAR JUMP WAS DISCOVERED IN 1998. IT IS THE ONLY WAY WE KNOW TO TRAVEL FROM STAR TO STAR, USING BLACK HOLES OR COLLAPSARS.
NEWSNIGHT
I WAS TEN YEARS OLD AT THAT TIME AND I STILL REMEMBER THAT EVENT. SOME THINGS YOU NEVER FORGET.
THE SPEED OF LIGHT IS ACTUALLY SURPASSED. MATHEMATICIANS HAVE TO REWRITE THE THEORY OF RELATIVITY.
FROM NOW ON, TO SEND A GROUP OF COLONISTS TO RIGEL WILL COST LESS THAN THE HISTORIC FIRST LANDING ON THE MOON IN 1969!
THERE WERE PLENTY OF PEOPLE THE POLITICIANS WOULD LIKE TO SEE CARRY CIVILIZATION TO THE STARS--AS LONG AS THEY WOULD STAY THERE!
THE SPACE VESSELS ARE ACCOMPANIED BY AN AUTOMATIC PROBE THAT FOLLOWS SEVERAL MILLION KILOMETERS BEHIND THEM...
THE PORTAL PLANETS REVOLVE AROUND COLLAPSARS AND SERVE AS RELAY STATIONS FOR THE FARTHEST EXPEDITIONS.
THE PROBE IS PROGRAMMED TO RETURN AUTOMATICALLY IF A PILOT VESSEL IS DESTROYED.
THIS HAPPENED FOR THE FIRST TIME ON DECEMBER 10, 2007. A PROBE FELL IN THE PACIFIC...
ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

ITS TAPES SIGNALED THAT THE COLUMBIA 4 HAD BEEN INTERCEPTED AND DESTROYED BY A SPACE SHIP...

...OF EXTRATERRESTRIAL ORIGIN. THIS ATTACK HAPPENED NEAR **ALDEBARAN**, IN THE **TAURUS** CONSTELLATION.

SINCE THE TERM "ALDEBARANIAN" SOUNDED AWKWARD, THE ENEMIES WERE CALLED **TAURANS**.

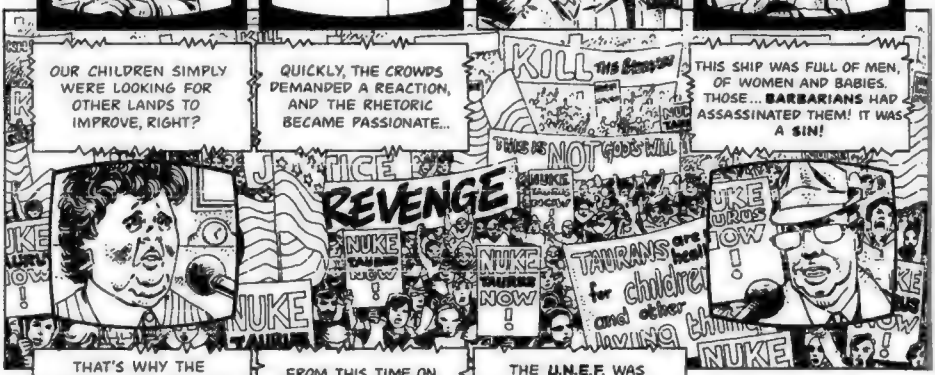
THE ATTACK PROVOKED SHOCK ON EARTH. *WE ARE NOT ALONE IN THE UNIVERSE...*



OUR CHILDREN SIMPLY WERE LOOKING FOR OTHER LANDS TO IMPROVE, RIGHT?

QUICKLY, THE CROWDS DEMANDED A REACTION, AND THE RHETORIC BECAME PASSIONATE...

THIS SHIP WAS FULL OF MEN, OF WOMEN AND BABIES. THOSE... **BARBARIANS** HAD ASSASSINATED THEM! IT WAS A **SIN!**

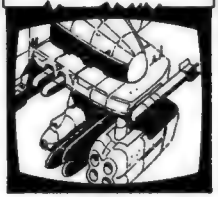


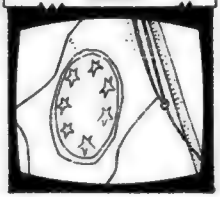
THAT'S WHY THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO PUT INTO SERVICE SEVERAL SPACE CRUISERS...

FROM THIS TIME ON, THE COLONISTS WERE ESCORTED BY HEAVILY ARMED SHIPS...

THE **U.N.E.F.** WAS FOUNDED: THE **UNITED NATIONS EXPLORATORY FORCE.**

EMPHASIS ON "**FORCE.**"

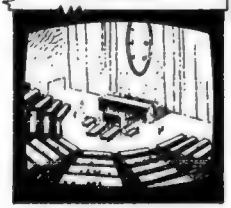




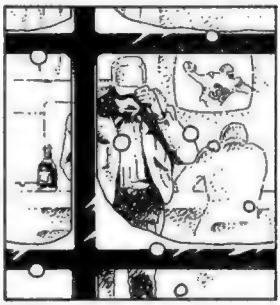
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE U.N.E.F. DECIDED TO RECRUIT A CORPS OF ELITE...

WHACK WACK WACK!

WHEW!...THE REST, I KNEW. DAMN IT.



SOME BRIGHT LAD DECIDED THAT WE OUGHT TO FIELD AN ARMY OF FOOT SOLDIERS TO GUARD THE PORTAL PLANETS OF THE NEAREST COLLAPSARS...



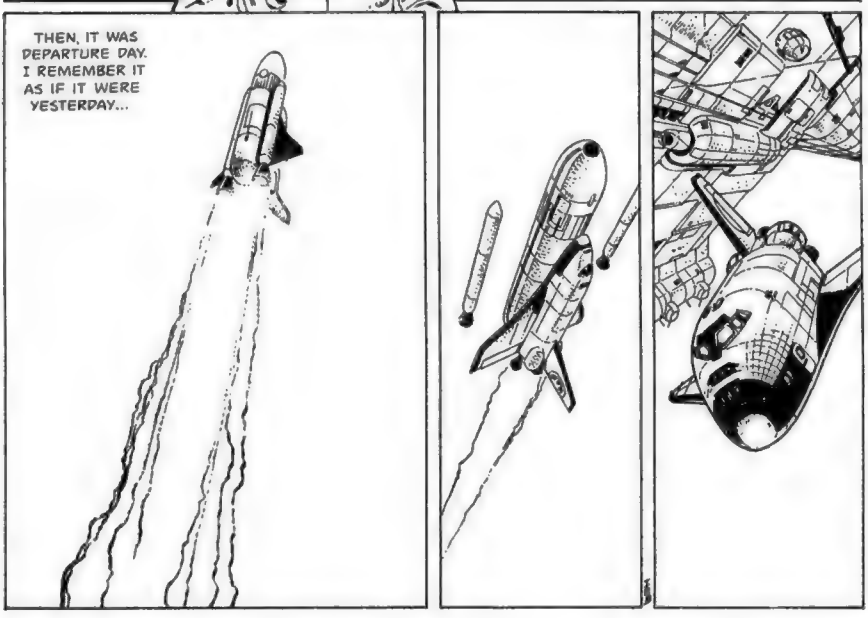
THIS WAS THE ELITE CONSCRIPTION ACT OF 2009... AN INTENSIVE SELECTION PROCESS RECRUITED THE MOST ELITE DRAFTEES IN THE HISTORY OF WARFARE...

AND WE WERE IT: FIFTY MEN AND FIFTY WOMEN WITH I.Q.'S HIGHER THAN 150 AND BODIES OF UNUSUAL HEALTH AND STRENGTH...

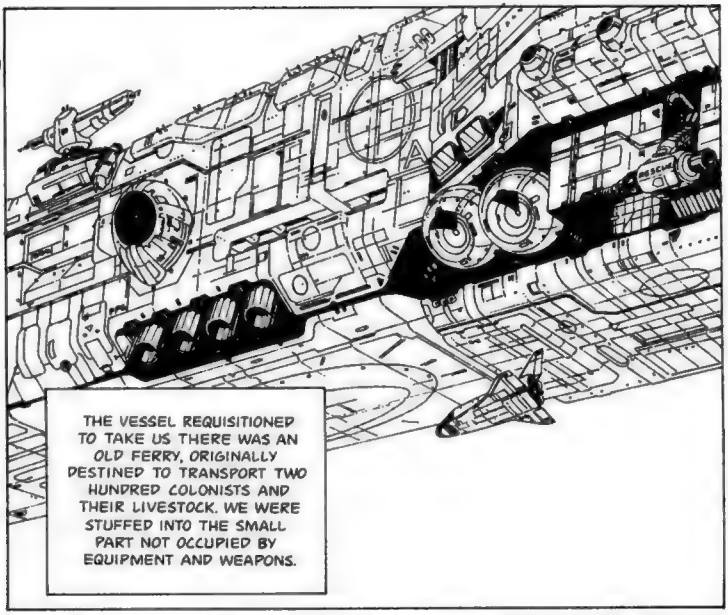
...MINUS ONE... WITH BOVANOVITCH'S DEATH...

SLOGGING *ELITELY* THROUGH THE MUD AND SLUSH OF CENTRAL MISSOURI... LEARNING HOW, FOR INSTANCE TO DEFEAT AN ENEMY WHO COULD BE SIX METERS TALL... OR THE SIZE OF AN ANT.

THEN, IT WAS DEPARTURE DAY. I REMEMBER IT AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY...

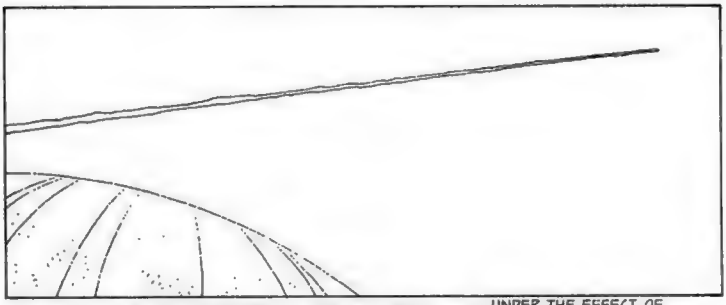


ALTHOUGH LOCATED AT PERIHELION, THE POINT IN ITS ORBIT CLOSEST TO THE SUN, CERBERUS WAS STILL TWICE AS FAR OUT AS PLUTO.

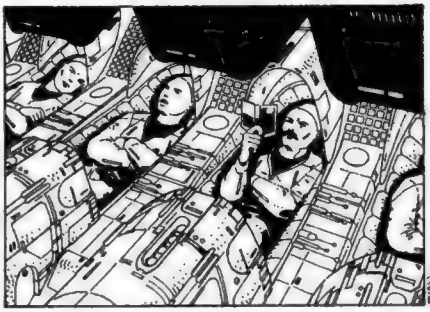


THE VESSEL REQUISITIONED TO TAKE US THERE WAS AN OLD FERRY, ORIGINALLY DESTINED TO TRANSPORT TWO HUNDRED COLONISTS AND THEIR LIVESTOCK. WE WERE STUFFED INTO THE SMALL PART NOT OCCUPIED BY EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS.

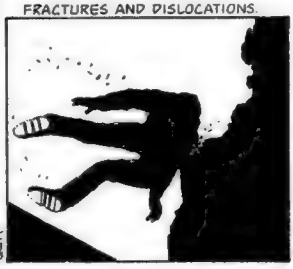
THE TRIP TOOK THREE WEEKS, ACCELERATING AT TWO GEES HALFWAY, THEN DECELERATING THE OTHER HALF. OUR TOP SPEED, AS WE ROARED BY THE ORBIT OF PLUTO WAS ABOUT 1/20TH THE SPEED OF LIGHT.



THREE WEEKS OF CARRYING AROUND TWICE AS MUCH WEIGHT AS NORMAL... IT'S NO PICNIC. EXCEPT FOR SOME CAUTIOUS EXERCISES, WE STAYED IN BED DURING THE GREATEST PART OF THE TRIP, FOR...



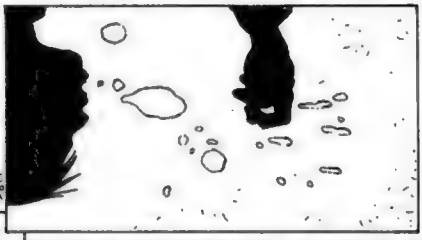
...UNDER THE EFFECT OF ACCELERATION CLUMSINESS WAS PAID BACK WITH SERIOUS FRACTURES AND DISLOCATIONS.

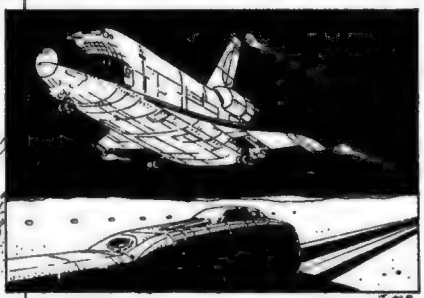


WE WERE TOLD NOT TO SLEEP. WE HAD CONSTANT SENSATIONS OF CHOKING AND BEING CRUSHED. AN ALARM WOKE US UP EACH HOUR TO PREVENT BLOOD POOLING AND BEDSORES.

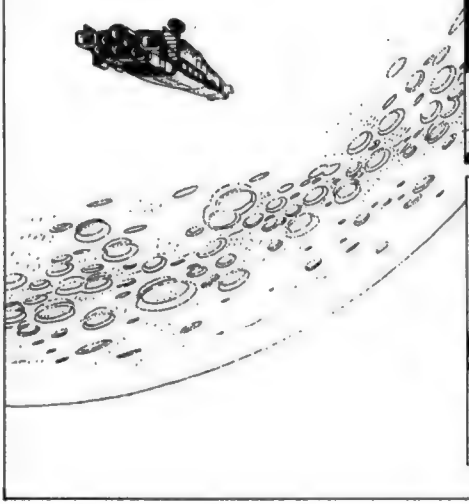
ONE WOMAN GOT SO FATIGUED THAT SHE SLEPT UNMOVING FOR HOURS AND HAD A RIB FRACTURE PUSH THROUGH HER CHEST WALL.

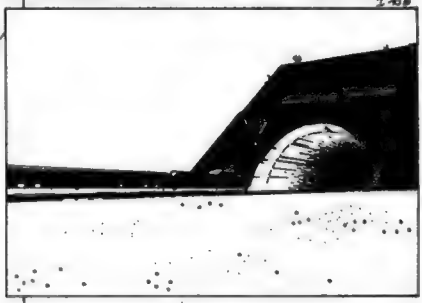
THE FOLLOWING PERIOD, ORBITING IN FREE FALL, WAS A PAINFUL TEST FOR SOME STOMACHS: VERTIGO AND UNCONTROLABLE VOMITING!



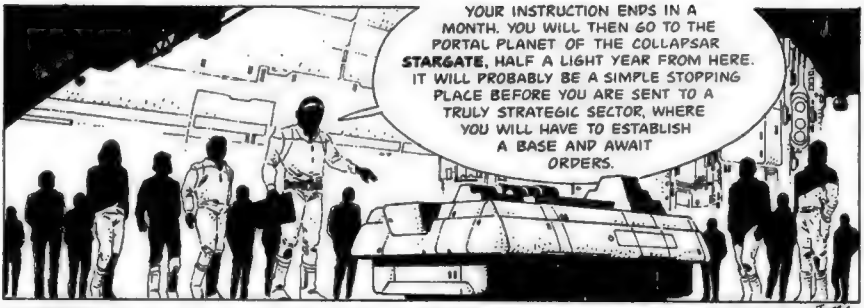


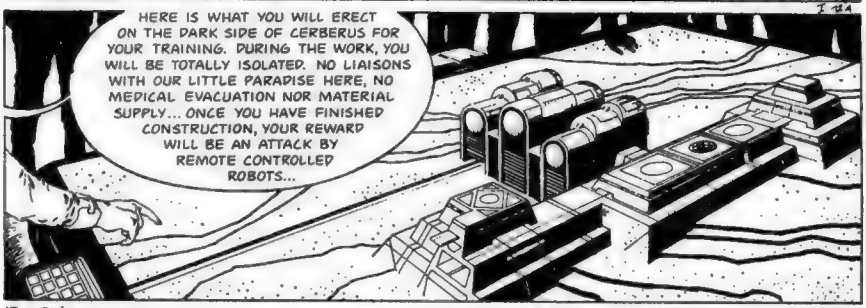
THEN DOWN TO CERBERUS!





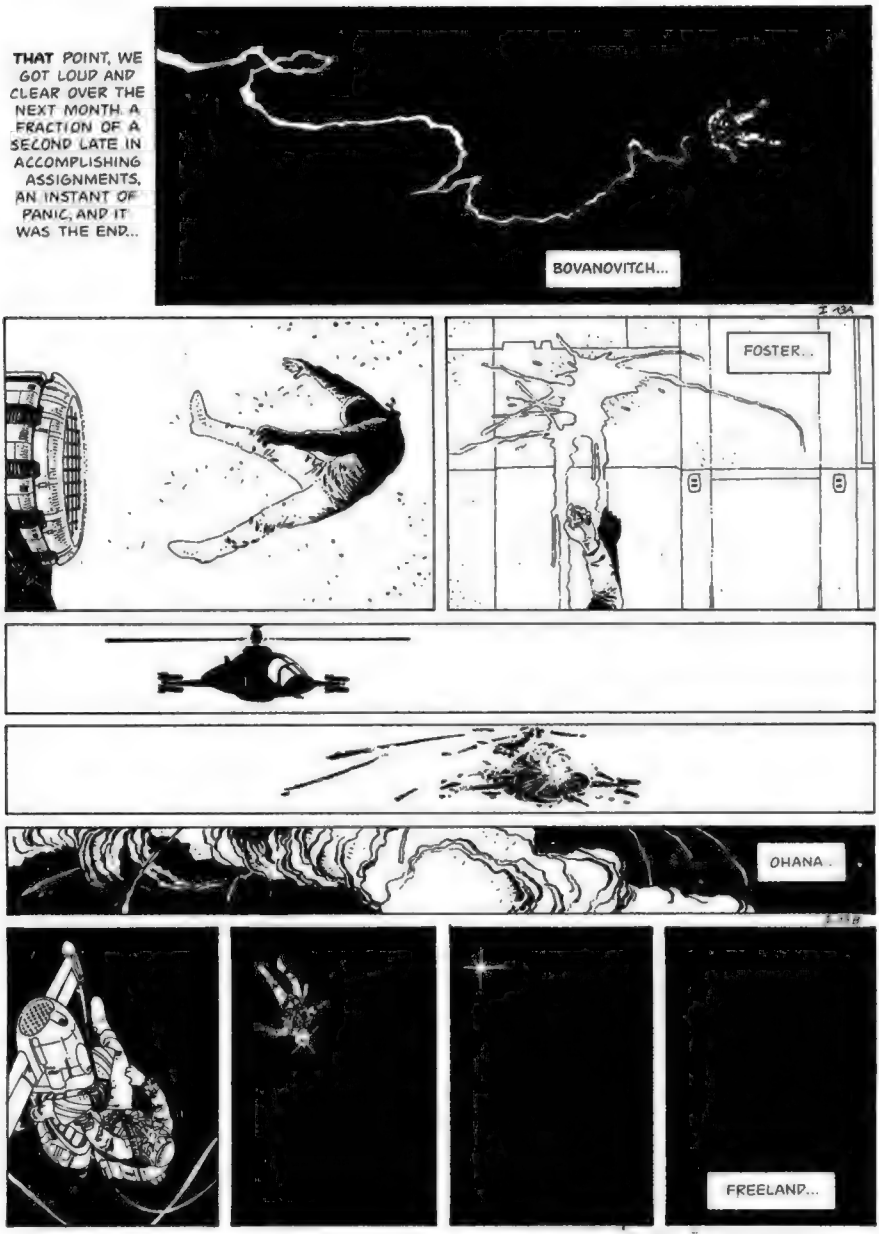
WELCOME TO CERBERUS, SOLDIERS! YOU HAVE CHOSEN AN IDEAL DAY TO LAND...
THE TEMPERATURE OUTSIDE IS 8 DEGREES ABOVE ABSOLUTE ZERO. ENJOY THE TROPICAL CLIMATE; WHERE YOU'RE HEADED...
A SMARTASS
I'M OCTAVIO CORTEZ, YOUR INSTRUCTOR.
YOUR EARTHSIDE TRAINING WAS DESIGNED TO GRANT YOU A SMALL CHANCE OF SURVIVING HERE: MISTRUST EVERYTHING AROUND YOU. AT THIS TEMPERATURE, YOUR EQUIPMENT NO LONGER WORKS NORMALLY... AND YOU MUST MOVE AROUND WITH CAUTION. YOUR AMPLIFIED STRENGTH COULD ALMOST PUT YOU INTO ORBIT AROUND A ROCK LIKE CERBERUS.
I HAVE FOLLOWED YOUR TRAINING PROGRAM AND I'M PLEASANTLY SURPRISED THAT YOU HAVE ALL SUCCEEDED...
BUT HERE, I WILL NOT BE DISPLEASED IF ONLY HALF OF YOU PASS THIS LEVEL...
AND THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO FAIL: DEATH!
THE ONLY WAY ANYBODY GETS BACK TO EARTH--INCLUDING ME-- IS AFTER A COMBAT TOUR.
MISTRUST
ROGERS
RETURN


YOUR INSTRUCTION ENDS IN A MONTH. YOU WILL THEN GO TO THE PORTAL PLANET OF THE COLLAPSAR **STARGATE**, HALF A LIGHT YEAR FROM HERE. IT WILL PROBABLY BE A SIMPLE STOPPING PLACE BEFORE YOU ARE SENT TO A TRULY STRATEGIC SECTOR, WHERE YOU WILL HAVE TO ESTABLISH A BASE AND AWAIT ORDERS.


HERE IS WHAT YOU WILL ERECT ON THE DARK SIDE OF CERBERUS FOR YOUR TRAINING. DURING THE WORK, YOU WILL BE TOTALLY ISOLATED. NO LIAISONS WITH OUR LITTLE PARADISE HERE, NO MEDICAL EVACUATION NOR MATERIAL SUPPLY... ONCE YOU HAVE FINISHED CONSTRUCTION, YOUR REWARD WILL BE AN ATTACK BY REMOTE CONTROLLED ROBOTS...

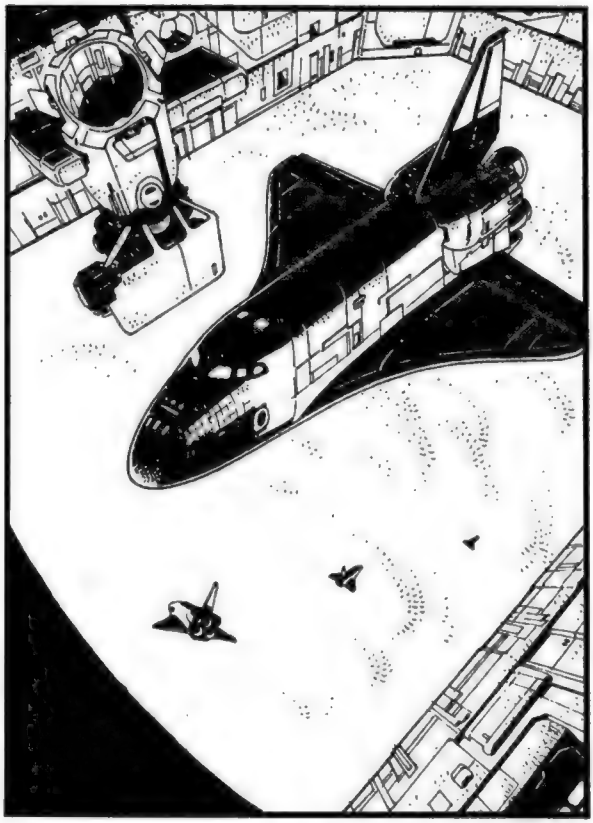
IT WON'T BE A PICNIC. FROM YOUR APTITUDE FOR DEFENDING YOURSELVES WE'LL BE ABLE TO DETERMINE YOUR ULTIMATE CHANCES...
THEY SPENT ALL THAT MONEY TO KILL US DURING *TRAINING?*
A REMINDER... THIS BASE WAS CONSTRUCTED BY FORTY-FIVE PIONEERS. ONLY TWENTY SURVIVED. I'M GOING TO *TRY* TO KEEP YOU ALIVE.
MAJOR
MELINA

YOU WILL OBEY ME BLINDLY, FOR THERE IS ONLY ONE PENALTY OUT THERE FOR DISOBEDIENCE...
...THE DEATH PENALTY...
ON THE SPOT!
AND I WON'T HAVE TO BE THE EXECUTIONER...
...CERBERUS WILL BE.
KOTTEK
BOWANOVITCH


THAT POINT, WE GOT LOUD AND CLEAR OVER THE NEXT MONTH. A FRACTION OF A SECOND LATE IN ACCOMPLISHING ASSIGNMENTS, AN INSTANT OF PANIC, AND IT WAS THE END...
BOVANOVITCH...
FOSTER...
OHANA.
FREELAND...
•TO BE CONTINUED...•

THE FOREVER WAR

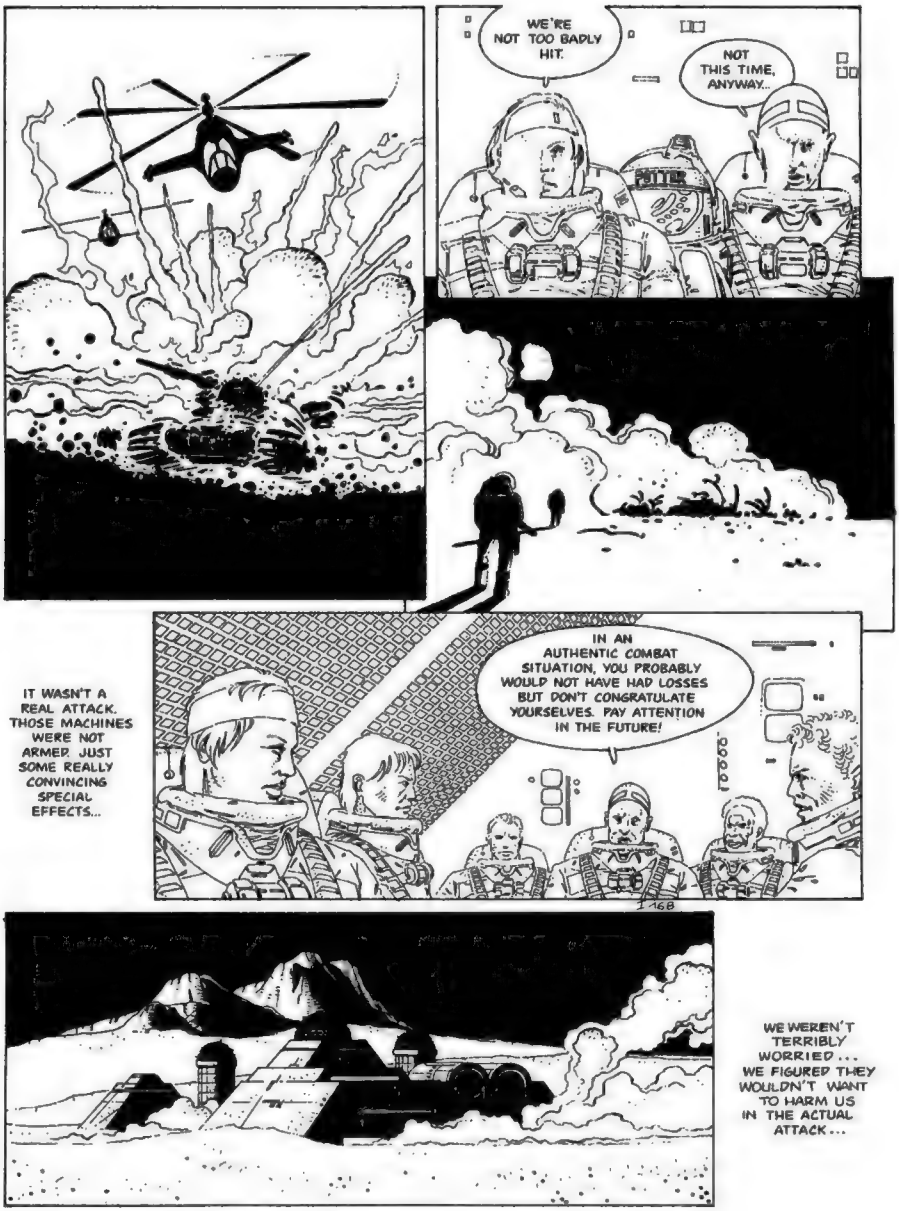
BY
HALDEMAN & MARVANO

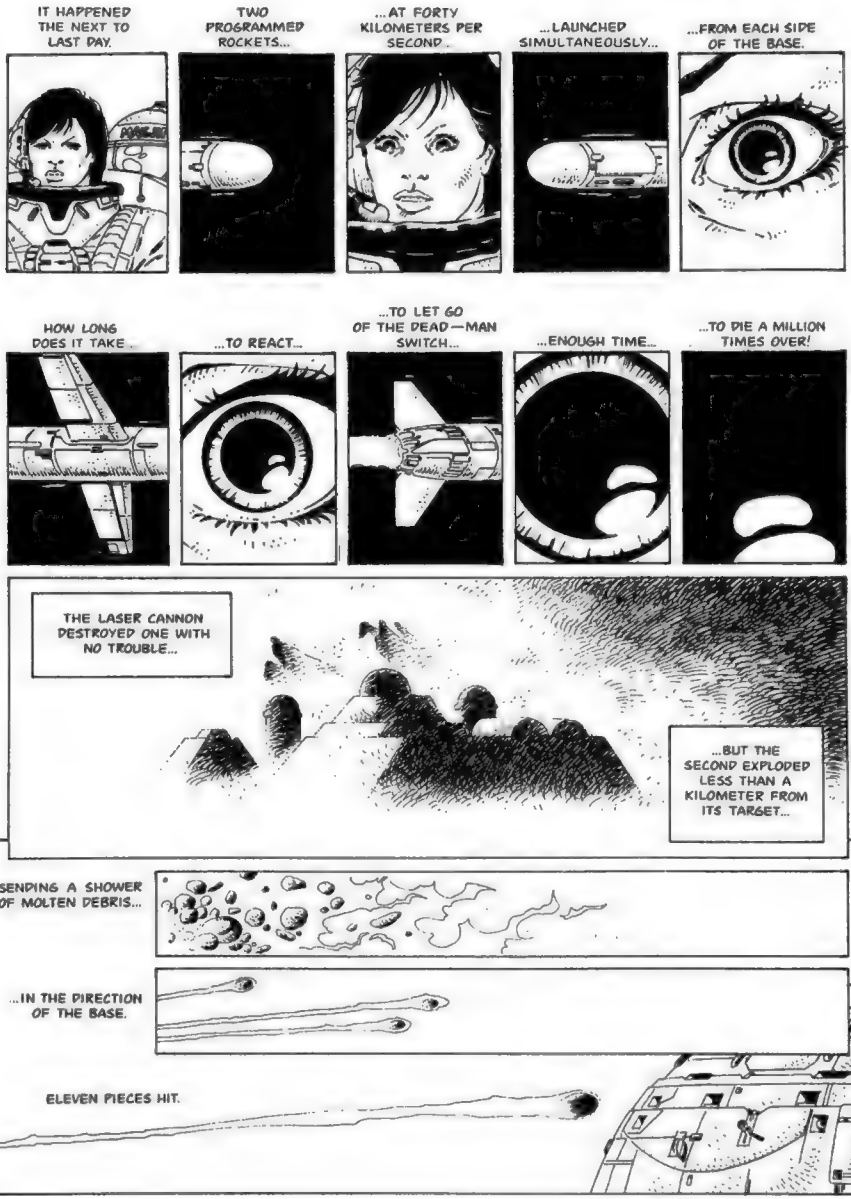


BOOK ONE
CHAPTER TWO

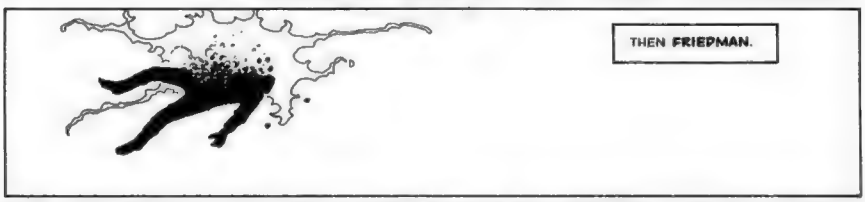
THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BASE COST ELEVEN HUMAN LIVES...
TWELVE COUNTING DAHLQUIST, WHO MIGHT HAVE PREFERRED TO BE LESS LUCKY: TO SPEND THE REST OF HIS LIFE ON CERBERUS, MISSING ONE HAND AND TWO LEGS, WAS NOT MUCH MORE THAN A DEATH DEFERRED.
EACH DEATH TOOK AWAY MORE OF OUR ILLUSIONS, OUR HOPES...EACH ONE MADE US MORE FEARFUL AND PRUDENT. WE FORCED OURSELVES NOT TO BECOME TOO CLOSE TO OUR COMPANIONS.
WERE YOU STILL IN SCHOOL WHEN YOU WERE CALLED UP?
YES. I WAS WORKING ON MY DOCTORATE IN PHYSICS. I WANTED TO TEACH.
I WAS IN BIOLOGY.
AT WHAT LEVEL?
IT'S TOO LONG AGO, REALLY... ON ANOTHER FUCKING PLANET!
HUH?...
LOOK...
HEADS UP!
MANDELLA! IT'S AN ATTACK!

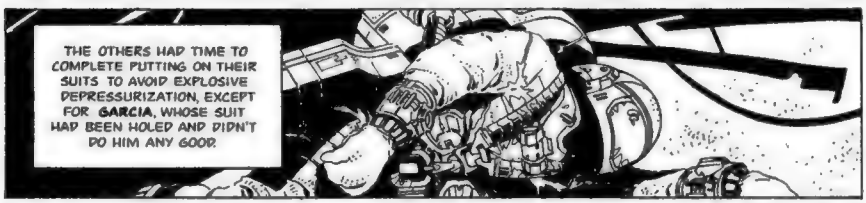
OUR FRIENDS THE ROBOTS WERE BRINGING OUR MIDTERM EXAM. POTTER COORDINATED THE FIRING. I WORKED THE LASER CANNON.
IASA
THE CANNON OPERATOR HELD ON TO A DEAD-MAN SWITCH THAT KEPT THE CANNON FROM AUTOMATICALLY SHOOTING DOWN ANYTHING THAT CAME OVER THE HORIZON...
...JUST IN CASE SOMEONE FRIENDLY SHOWED UP. IF YOU LET GO, IT WOULD TARGET AND DESTROY MORE THAN TWENTY ATTACKERS PER SECOND.
WE LEARNED BY EXPERIENCE THAT THIS SYSTEM ALSO HAD ITS FAULTS.
ROGERS! SOME INFANTRY VEHICLES ARE MOVING TOWARD SAS 5!
450 METERS.
GARCIA! SEND YOUR COMPANY OUTSIDE!
ATTENTION! DOOR 6 SEEMS TO BE BLOCKED!
WE HAD THE SITUATION IN HAND...

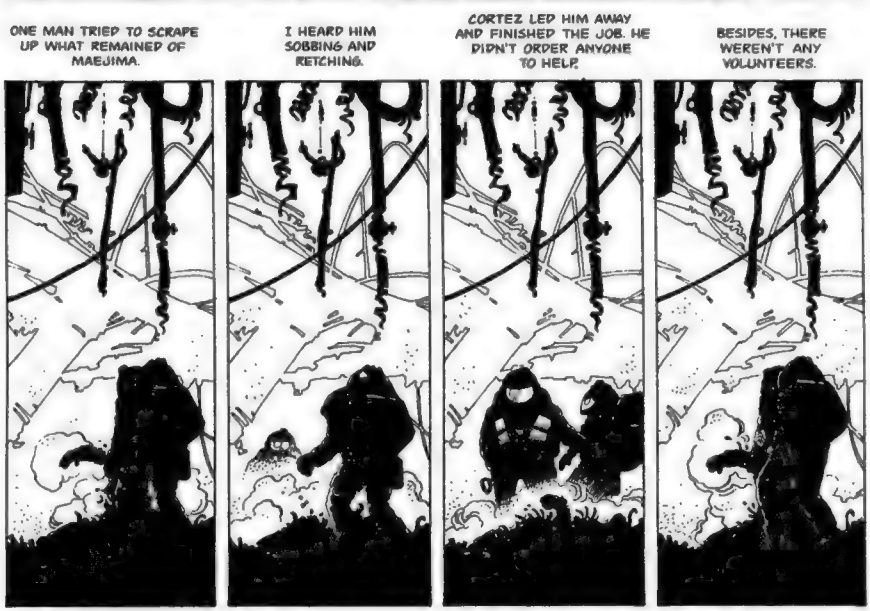

WE'RE NOT TOO BADLY HIT.
NOT THIS TIME, ANYWAY...
IN AN AUTHENTIC COMBAT SITUATION, YOU PROBABLY WOULD NOT HAVE HAD LOSSES BUT DON'T CONGRATULATE YOURSELVES. PAY ATTENTION IN THE FUTURE!
IT WASN'T A REAL ATTACK. THOSE MACHINES WERE NOT ARMED. JUST SOME REALLY CONVINCING SPECIAL EFFECTS...
WE WEREN'T TERRIBLY WORRIED... WE FIGURED THEY WOULDN'T WANT TO HARM US IN THE ACTUAL ATTACK...


IT HAPPENED THE NEXT TO LAST DAY.
TWO PROGRAMMED ROCKETS...
...AT FORTY KILOMETERS PER SECOND...
...LAUNCHED SIMULTANEOUSLY...
...FROM EACH SIDE OF THE BASE.
HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE...
...TO REACT...
...TO LET GO OF THE DEAD—MAN SWITCH...
...ENOUGH TIME...
...TO DIE A MILLION TIMES OVER!
THE LASER CANNON DESTROYED ONE WITH NO TROUBLE...
...BUT THE SECOND EXPLODED LESS THAN A KILOMETER FROM ITS TARGET...
SENDING A SHOWER OF MOLTEN DEBRIS...
...IN THE DIRECTION OF THE BASE.
ELEVEN PIECES HIT.

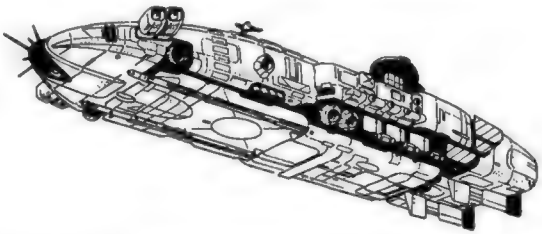
MAEJIMA WAS THE FIRST TO DIE.


THEN FRIEDMAN.

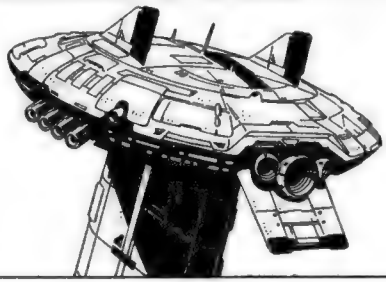

THE OTHERS HAD TIME TO COMPLETE PUTTING ON THEIR SUITS TO AVOID EXPLOSIVE DEPRESSURIZATION, EXCEPT FOR GARCIA, WHOSE SUIT HAD BEEN HOLED AND DIDN'T DO HIM ANY GOOD.


ONE MAN TRIED TO SCRAPE UP WHAT REMAINED OF MAEJIMA.
I HEARD HIM SOBBING AND RETCHING.
CORTEZ LED HIM AWAY AND FINISHED THE JOB. HE DIDN'T ORDER ANYONE TO HELP.
BESIDES, THERE WEREN'T ANY VOLUNTEERS.

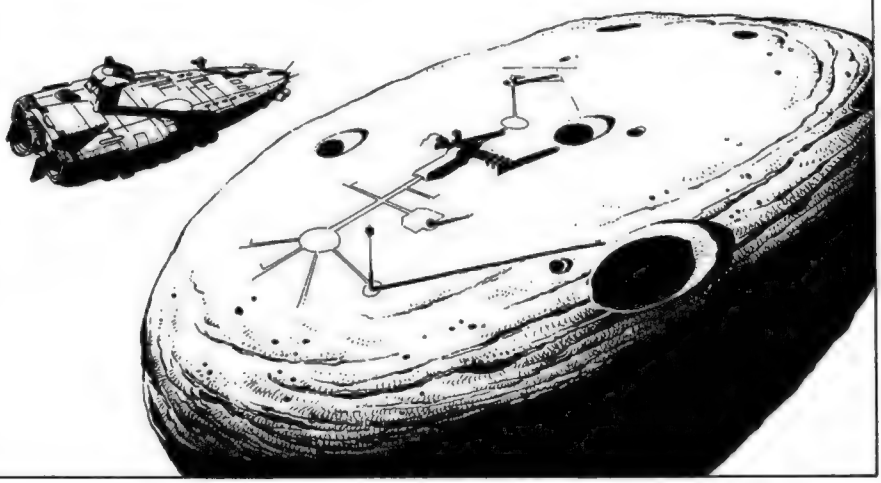
THE LAST TEST WAS THE VOYAGE TO STARGATE. THE OLD FERRY THAT WE RODE TO CERBERUS HAD BEEN FITTED AS A CRUISER AND RE-BAPTIZED **EARTH'S HOPE!** MADE ME WANT TO STAND UP AND SALUTE.

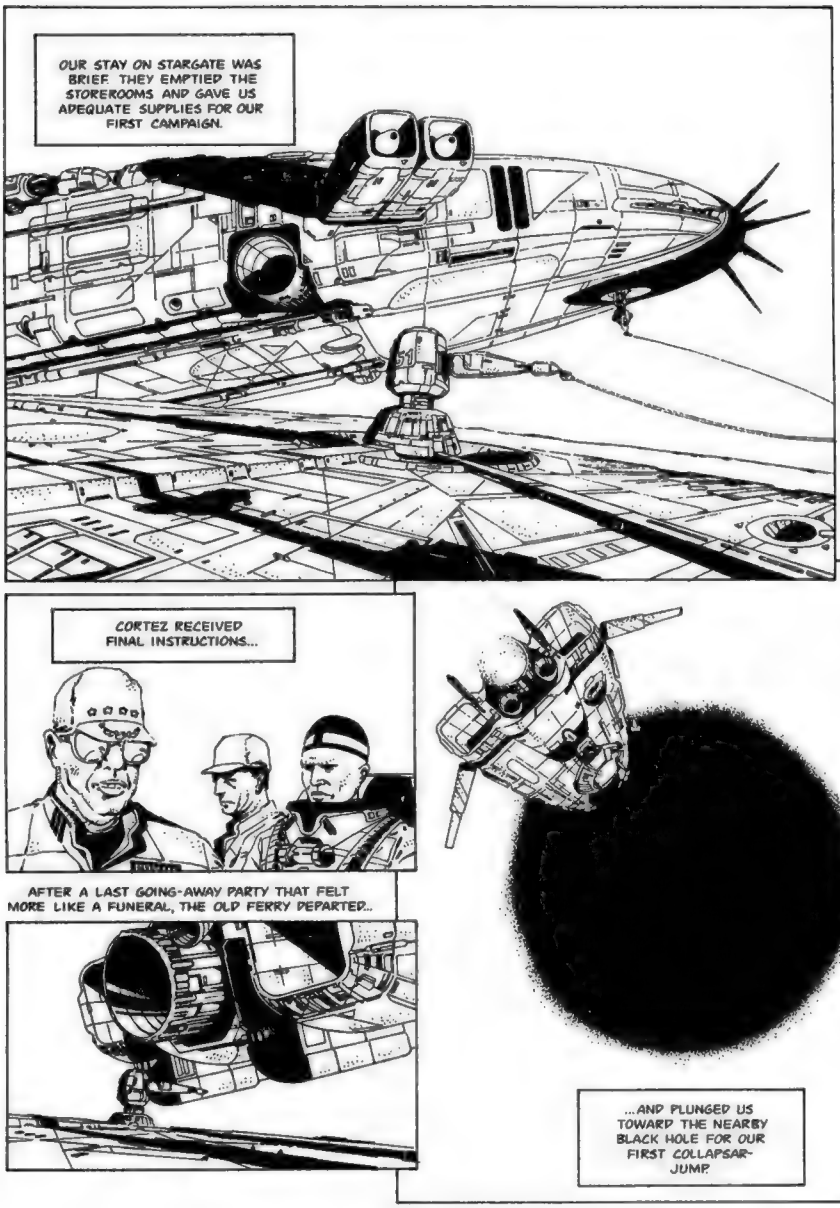


AN INTERMINABLE VOYAGE: SIX MONTHS OF BOREDOM IN SUBJECTIVE TIME, BUT VERY MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE-- ONE G AND ELBOW ROOM-- THAN OUR FLIGHT TO CERBERUS.



STARGATE: AN ENORMOUS BLOCK OF ROCK ORBITING IN SPACE. THE BASE WAS HARDLY BIGGER THAN THE ONE WE HAD JUST BUILT ON CERBERUS.



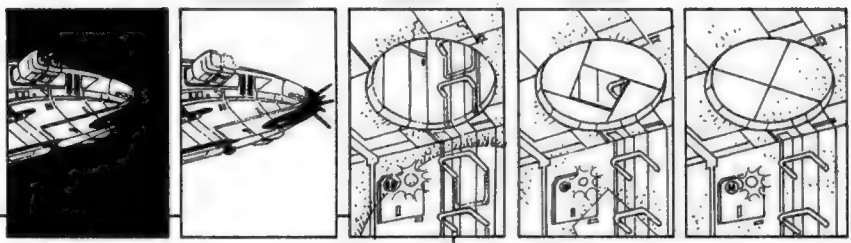

OUR STAY ON STARGATE WAS BRIEF. THEY EMPTIED THE STOREROOMS AND GAVE US ADEQUATE SUPPLIES FOR OUR FIRST CAMPAIGN.
CORTEZ RECEIVED FINAL INSTRUCTIONS...
AFTER A LAST GOING-AWAY PARTY THAT FELT MORE LIKE A FUNERAL, THE OLD FERRY DEPARTED..
...AND PLUNGED US TOWARD THE NEARBY BLACK HOLE FOR OUR FIRST COLLAPSAR-JUMP.

AT FIRST THERE WAS A PERIOD OF FREE FALL, AND THEN WE WERE CRUSHED BACK INTO OUR COUCHES.

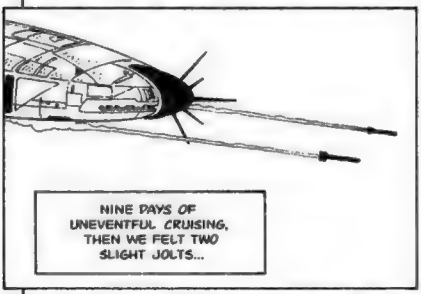
AFTER A FEW COURSE CORRECTIONS...

...WE JUST DROPPED IN SILENCE...

...THEN AN ALARM SOUNDED...



WE WERE IN ENEMY TERRITORY.



NINE DAYS OF UNEVENTFUL CRUISING, THEN WE FELT TWO SLIGHT JOLTS...

EIGHT HOURS LATER, WE GOT THE WORD...

ATTENTION CREW! COMMANDER QUINSANA SPEAKING...

FOR THE PAST 180 HOURS, WE HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED BY A TAURAN VESSEL...

AT 0715, WE OPENED FIRE WITH TWO 1200 MEGATON MISSILES.

AT 1540, OUR PROJECTILES HIT THE ADVERSARY'S VESSEL, AS WELL AS ANOTHER OBJECT THAT HAD LEFT THE VESSEL SOME SECONDS BEFORE...

THE ENEMY IS AWARE OF OUR PRESENCE IN THIS SECTOR. BUT HE DOES NOT KNOW OUR MISSION. SERGEANT CORTEZ WILL EXPLAIN IT TO YOU.

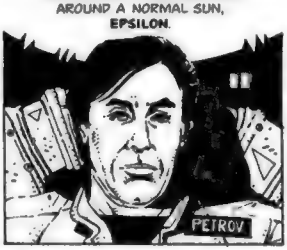
CORTEZ HERE...

I WAS WITH YOU ON CERBERUS AND I KNOW WHAT YOU WENT THROUGH. IT WAS HELL...

BUT WHERE YOU'RE GOING, THINGS ARE DIFFERENT...

...WARMER...

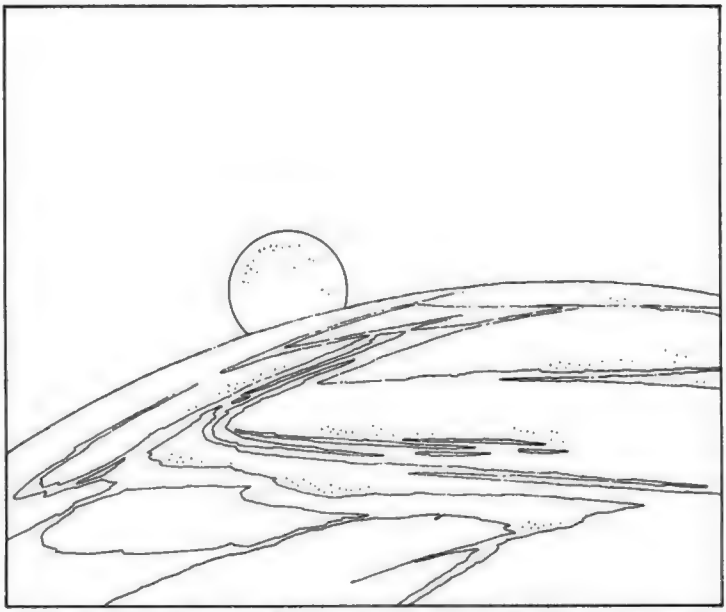
WE ARE GOING TO THE PLANET **ALEPH**, THAT REVOLVES WITH ITS COLLAPSAR, **ALEPH AURIGAE**, AROUND A NORMAL SUN, **EPSILON**.

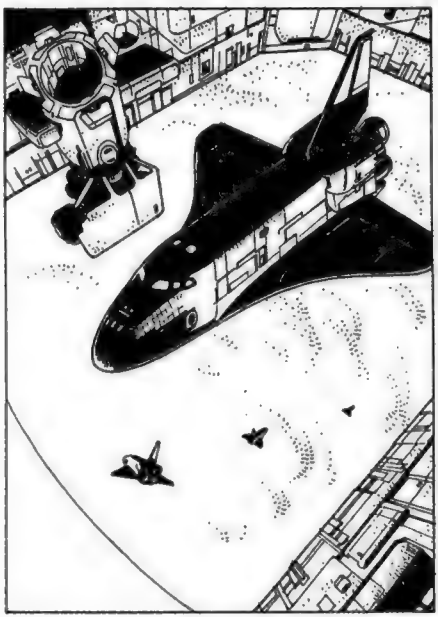


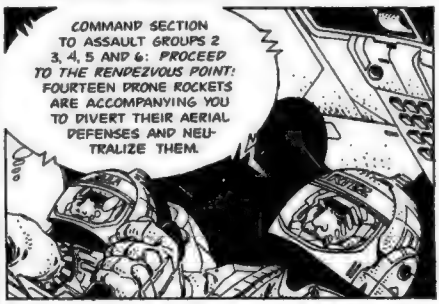
THE ENEMY HAS INSTALLED ONE OF ITS OPERATIONAL BASES THERE. WE MUST DESTROY IT AND BRING BACK ONE PRISONER.

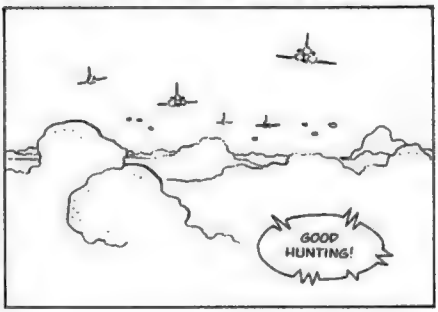
WE DON'T YET HAVE SUFFICIENT DATA TO COME UP WITH A BATTLE PLAN...

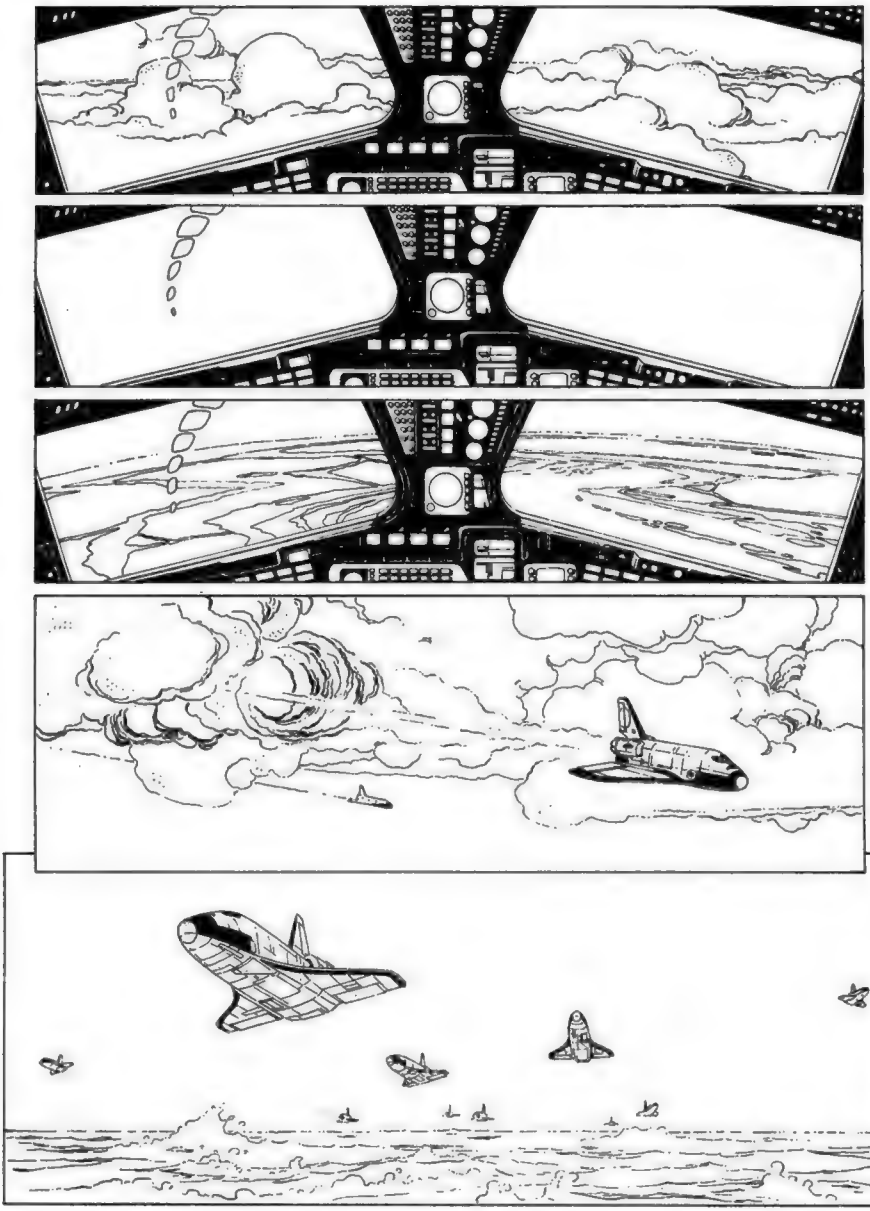
ALL WE CAN REALLY BE SURE OF IS A FEW BASIC FACTS:


"ALEPH IS RELATIVELY NEAR ITS SUN. IT'S COVERED WITH WATER VAPOR CLOUDS, BUT THE TEMPERATURE IS MUCH HIGHER THAN IN THE EQUATORIAL ZONES OF EARTH." WE WERE GOING FROM THE **FREEZER** INTO THE **OVEN**.




COMMAND SECTION TO ASSAULT GROUPS 2 3, 4, 5 AND 6: *PROCEED TO THE RENDEZVOUS POINT:* FOURTEEN DRONE ROCKETS ARE ACCOMPANYING YOU TO DIVERT THEIR AERIAL DEFENSES AND NEUTRALIZE THEM.

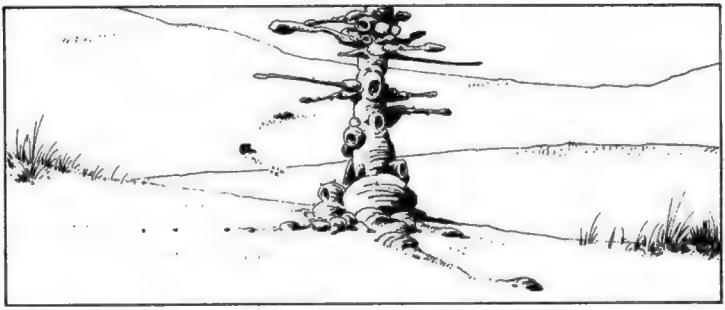

GOOD HUNTING!

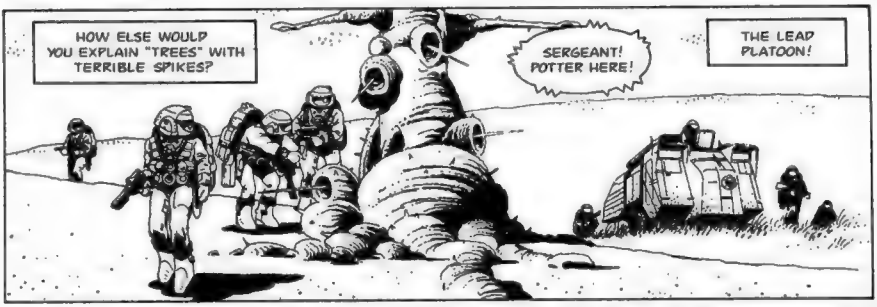


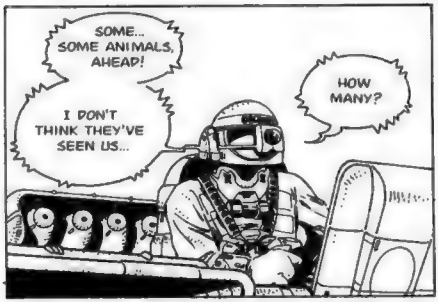
LISTEN UP! FROM THE MOMENT WE TOUCH DOWN...
...WE HAVE JUST FIVE MINUTES TO UNLOAD EVERYTHING.
THE OUTSIDE TEMPERATURE IS 79 CENTIGRADE.
THE BOILING WAVES SPRAYED ALONG THE BEACH. WE MOVED CAREFULLY IN THE LOW GRAVITY -- A THIRD OF EARTH'S.
A PEACEFUL LITTLE BEACH...
...WITH THE MONOTONOUS SOUND...
...OF MILLIONS OF PEBBLES...
...ROLLED BY THE SEA...
...SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME...

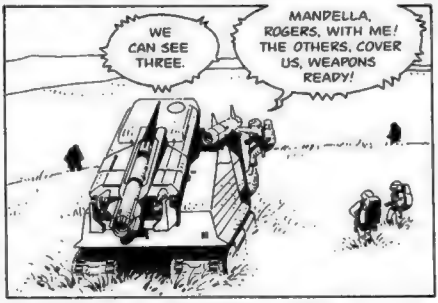
GET A MOVE ON! THE SHUTTLES HAVE TO GET BACK TO THE SHIP. THEN ASSEMBLE ON ME UP IN THE GRASS.
SHIT!
GRASS...
...DRIED UP...
...IN THIS HUMIDITY!
NO COVER...
WE'LL PROCEED NORTHWEST, PLATOON 1 ON POINT. THE OTHERS IN ARROW FORMATION AROUND THE COMMAND SQUAD. LET'S GO!
WE DIDN'T HAVE THE SLIGHTEST IDEA OF WHAT WE WOULD NEED WHEN WE FACED THE ENEMY. THE ADVANCE-GUARD PLATOON WAS A COLLECTION OF RATHER STRANGE SPECIALISTS...
...THAT EVEN HAD AN ACROBAT, AND A TELEPATH...

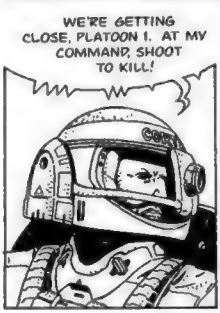
WE PASSED STRANGE LARGE PLANTS WITH RETRACTING STINGERS. A BLACK HAIRY WORM WAS THE ONLY FORM OF ANIMAL LIFE WE FOUND DURING THE FIRST TWO DAYS. ROGERS MAINTAINED THAT IT WAS ONLY A TINY SAMPLE OF THE LOCAL FAUNA...

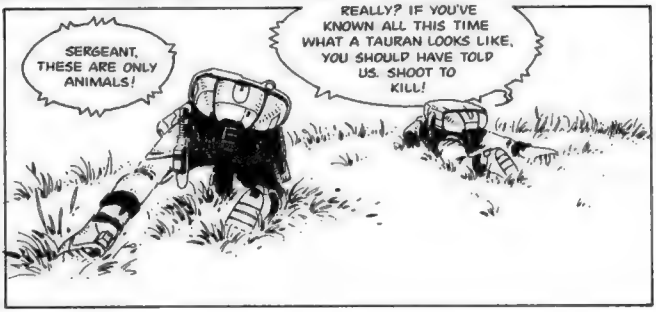


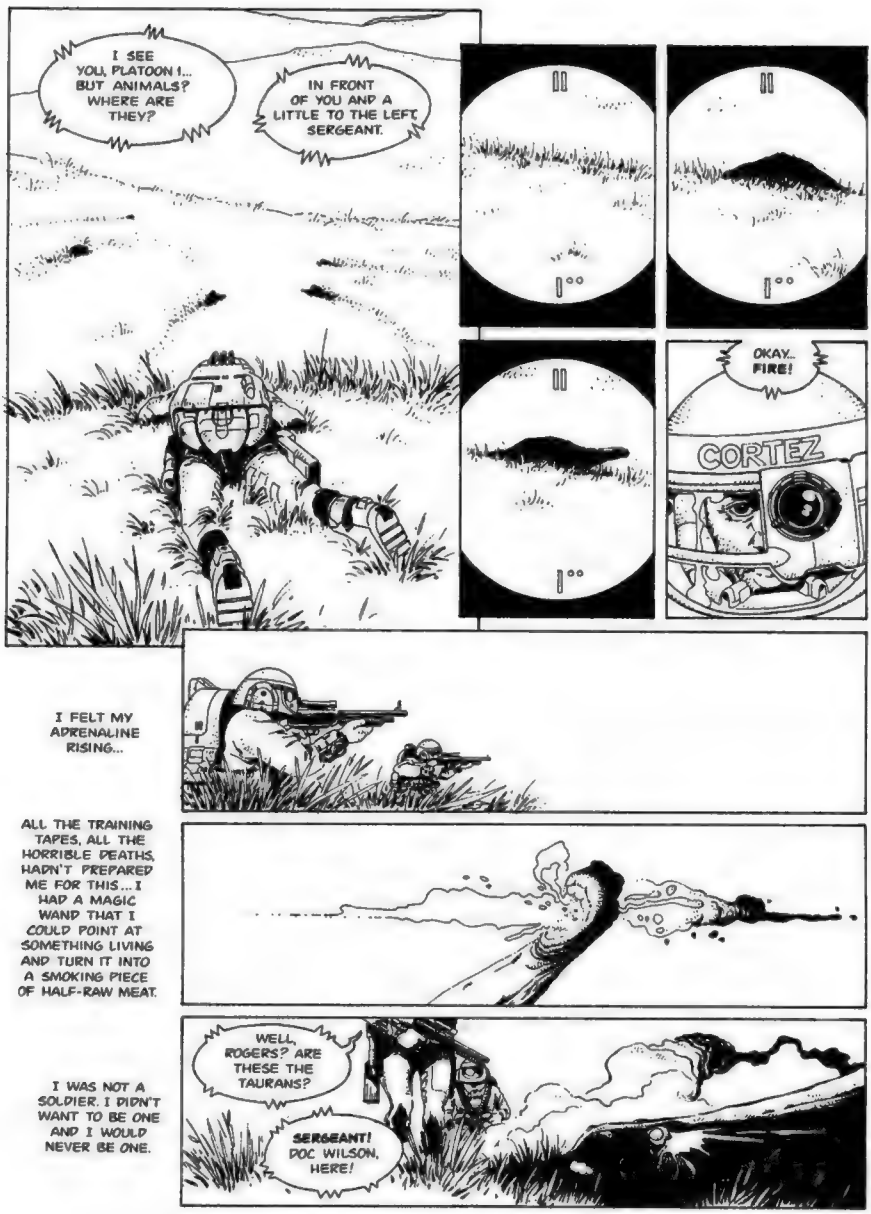









SERGEANT, THESE ARE ONLY ANIMALS!
REALLY? IF YOU'VE KNOWN ALL THIS TIME WHAT A TAURAN LOOKS LIKE, YOU SHOULD HAVE TOLD US. SHOOT TO KILL!


I SEE YOU, PLATOON 1... BUT ANIMALS? WHERE ARE THEY?
IN FRONT OF YOU AND A LITTLE TO THE LEFT, SERGEANT.
OKAY... FIRE!
CORTEZ
I FELT MY ADRENALINE RISING...
ALL THE TRAINING TAPES, ALL THE HORRIBLE DEATHS, HADN'T PREPARED ME FOR THIS... I HAD A MAGIC WAND THAT I COULD POINT AT SOMETHING LIVING AND TURN IT INTO A SMOKING PIECE OF HALF-RAW MEAT.
I WAS NOT A SOLDIER. I DIDN'T WANT TO BE ONE AND I WOULD NEVER BE ONE.
WELL, ROGERS? ARE THESE THE TAURANS?
SERGEANT! DOC WILSON, HERE!

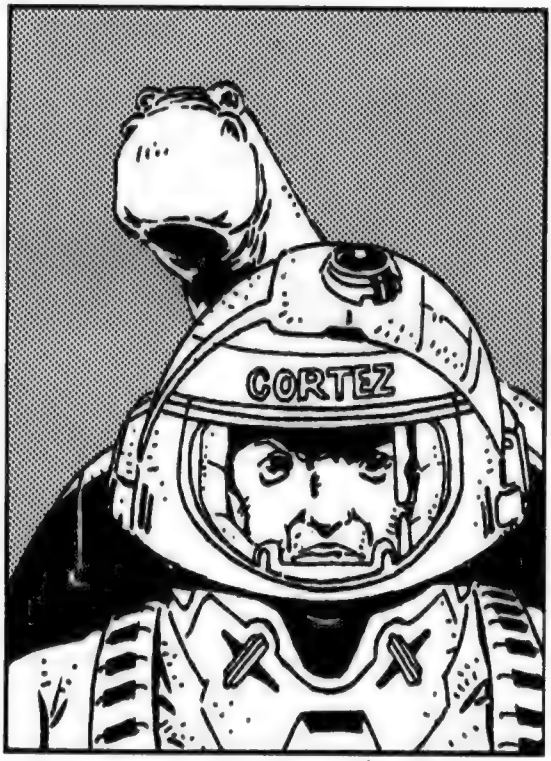
WHAT IS IT, POC?
HO... SHE'S...
HO
WHAT?!
CORTEZ
JUST A MINUTE ... I'M CHECKING HER BIOMEDICAL MONITOR...
MY GOD!
A TERRIBLE CEREBRAL HEMORRHAGE... IT HAPPENED THE MINUTE YOU OPENED FIRE!
I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT! IT'S LIKE A BOMB EXPLODED IN HER HEAD.
GOOD GRIEF. WASN'T SHE A TELEPATH? IF SO...
OH, LORD!
ALL PLATOONS! VERIFY WHETHER EVERYONE ANSWERS...
PEBBY HOLLISTER-- "LUCKY"-- AND FOUR OTHERS HAD SPLITTING HEADACHES THAT BEGAN THE INSTANT WE OPENED FIRE. HOLLISTER HAD TESTED SLIGHTLY RHINE-SENSITIVE, BUT THE OTHERS' TESTS WEREN'T CONCLUSIVE.
WE HAVE TO AVOID THOSE... MONSTERS, SERGEANT. AND ABOVE ALL ELSE AVOID HARMING ANYMORE OF THEM. NOT WHEN WE HAVE FIVE OTHERS WHO COULD END UP LIKE HO!
GOD DAMN IT, I DON'T NEED YOU TO TELL ME THAT. FIND ANYTHING, ROGERS?

LOOK...
WHAT'S THAT?
GRASS, SERGEANT. IT COMES FROM ITS STOMACH. IF THE TAURANS CAN EAT GRASS AND BREATHE THIS ATMOSPHERE, THEY CERTAINLY FOUND A PLANET REMARKABLY LIKE THEIR HOME.
SO?
NATIVE HERBIVORES, SERGEANT. SIMPLE FUCKING ANIMALS!
SIMPLE ANIMALS WHO COULD KILL WITH A THOUGHT... WE CONTINUED OUR MONOTONOUS PROCESSION...
FORCED MARCH DURING THE DAY...
...BIVOUAC AT SUNDOWN...
...GUARD DUTY AT NIGHT.

•TO BE CONTINUED...•

THE FOREVER WAR

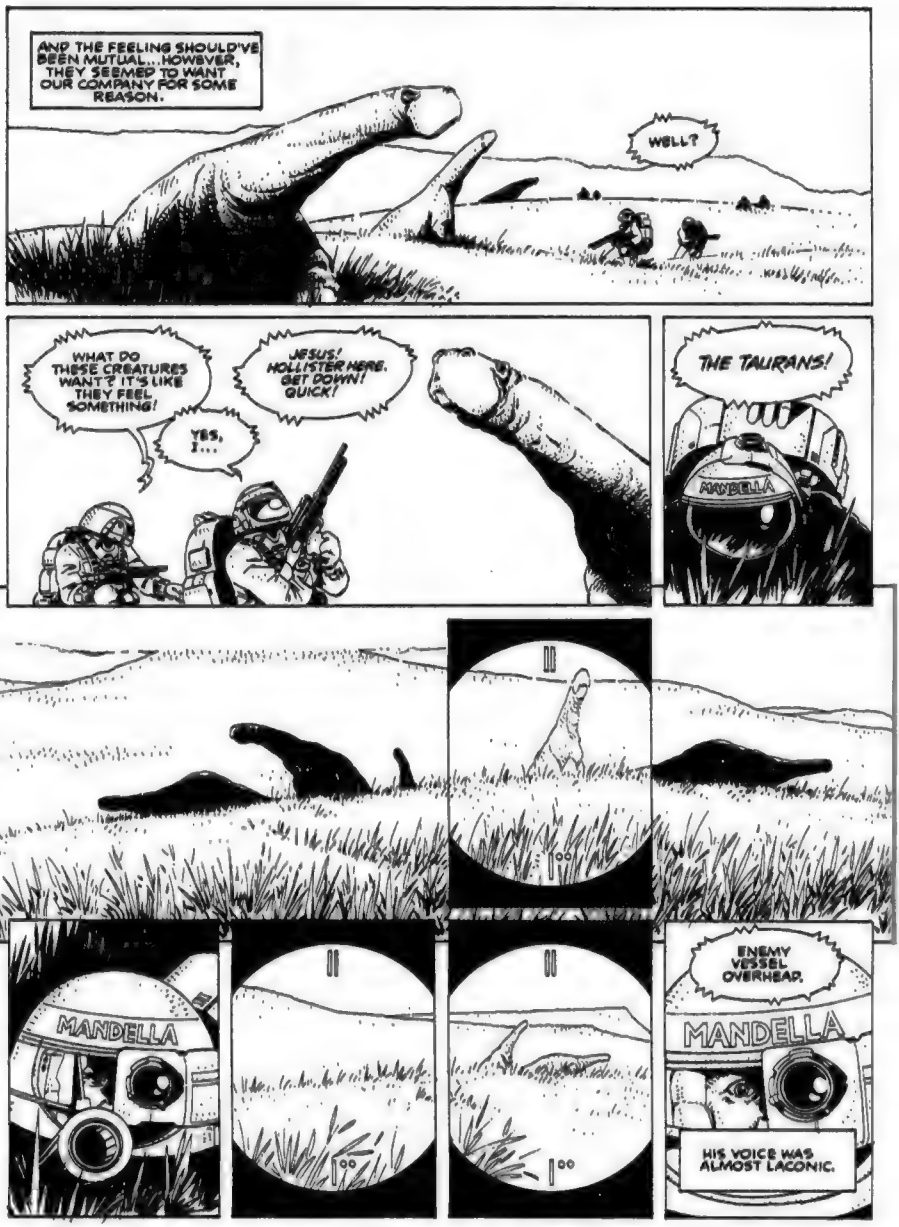
BY
HALDEMAN & MARVANO

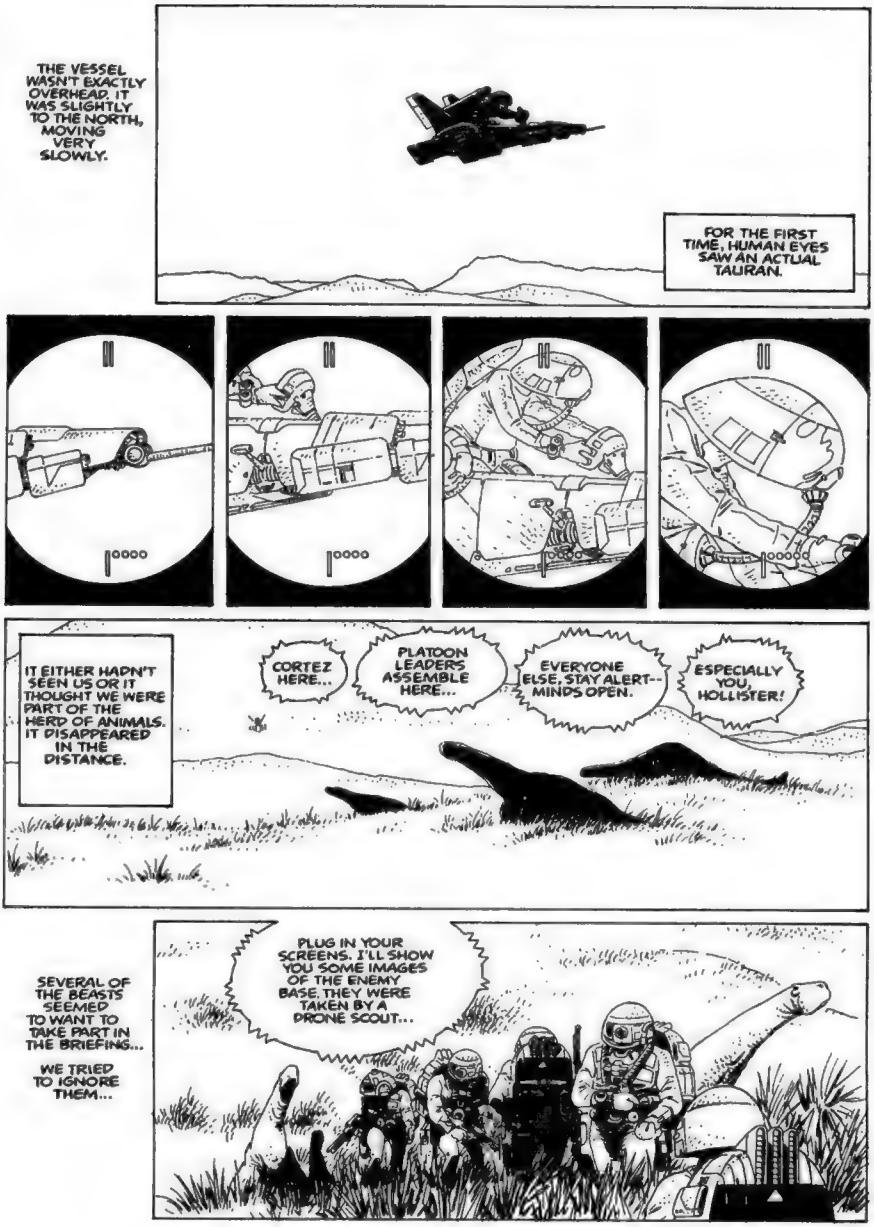


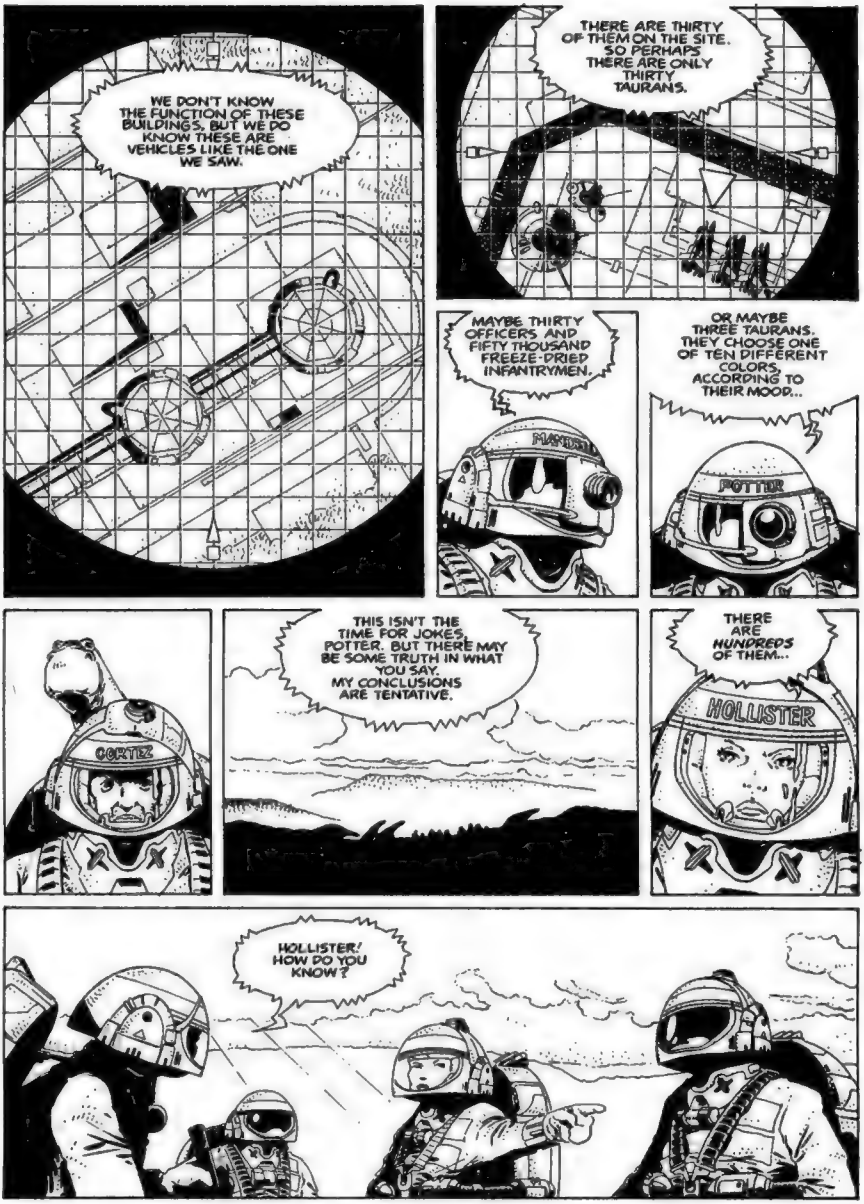
BOOK ONE
CHAPTER THREE

WHO GOES THERE?
ROGERS?
ROGERS, IS THAT YOU OVER THERE?
WHAT?
LORD! STRAIGHT AHEAD!
LOOK OUT!
IT'S MOVING!
DON'T SHOOT!
I HAVE MOVEMENT...
FUCKING ANIMAL.

IT CHEWED CALMLY...
ALMOST WITHOUT MOVING...
STARING AT ME.
WAS IT TRYING TO COMMUNICATE...
OR TO DESTROY ME?
MANDELLA
WHO KNOWS, WITH THOSE THINGS?
SERGEANT! HOLLISTER HERE. THEY'RE TRYING TO TELL US SOMETHING...
THEY'RE NOT AFRAID OF US... THEY THINK WE'RE... FUNNY!
THEY'RE CURIOUS. NOT DANGEROUS...
DON'T ASK ME HOW I KNOW. I FEEL IT!
HMM...
OKAY... CORTEZ HERE. I KNOW YOU'D LIKE TO SEE THEM DEAD FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO HO, BUT WE HAVE TO BE CAREFUL. LET THEM GRAZE IN PEACE.
I DIDN'T WANT TO SEE THEM DEAD. I DIDN'T WANT TO SEE THEM AT ALL.


AND THE FEELING SHOULD'VE BEEN MUTUAL... HOWEVER, THEY SEEMED TO WANT OUR COMPANY FOR SOME REASON.
WELL?
WHAT DO THESE CREATURES WANT? IT'S LIKE THEY FEEL SOMETHING!
JESUS! HOLLISTER HERE. GET DOWN! QUICK!
YES, I...
THE TAURANS!
MANDELLA
MANDELLA
MANDELLA
ENEMY VESSEL OVERHEAD.
HIS VOICE WAS ALMOST LACONIC.


THE VESSEL WASN'T EXACTLY OVERHEAD. IT WAS SLIGHTLY TO THE NORTH, MOVING VERY SLOWLY.
FOR THE FIRST TIME, HUMAN EYES SAW AN ACTUAL TAURAN.
IT EITHER HADN'T SEEN US OR IT THOUGHT WE WERE PART OF THE HERD OF ANIMALS. IT DISAPPEARED IN THE DISTANCE.
CORTEZ HERE...
PLATOON LEADERS ASSEMBLE HERE...
EVERYONE ELSE, STAY ALERT-- MINDS OPEN.
ESPECIALLY YOU, HOLLISTER!
SEVERAL OF THE BEASTS SEEMED TO WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE BRIEFING...
WE TRIED TO IGNORE THEM...
PLUG IN YOUR SCREENS. I'LL SHOW YOU SOME IMAGES OF THE ENEMY BASE. THEY WERE TAKEN BY A DRONE SCOUT...


WE DON'T KNOW THE FUNCTION OF THESE BUILDINGS, BUT WE DO KNOW THESE ARE VEHICLES LIKE THE ONE WE SAW.
THERE ARE THIRTY OF THEM ON THE SITE. SO PERHAPS THERE ARE ONLY THIRTY TAURANS.
MAYBE THIRTY OFFICERS AND FIFTY THOUSAND FREEZE-DRIED INFANTRYMEN.
MARTELL
OR MAYBE THREE TAURANS. THEY CHOOSE ONE OF TEN DIFFERENT COLORS ACCORDING TO THEIR MOOD...
POTTER
CORTEZ
THIS ISN'T THE TIME FOR JOKES, POTTER. BUT THERE MAY BE SOME TRUTH IN WHAT YOU SAY. MY CONCLUSIONS ARE TENTATIVE.
THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF THEM...
HOLLISTER
HOLLISTER! HOW DO YOU KNOW?

ALL RIGHT... LET'S SUPPOSE THEY HAVE AN ADVANTAGE IN NUMBERS. THE HOPE IS GOING TO SET OFF A NUCLEAR CHARGE IN THE UPPER LAYER OF THE ATMOSPHERE. WE'LL ATTACK AS SOON AS THEIR COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM IS JAMMED.
IF THEY USE RADIO, THE BLAST WILL NEUTRALIZE IT. WE'LL HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF SURPRISE.
UNLESS THE TAURANS ARE TELEPATHS THEMSELVES!
BUTTON IT, MANDELLA.
OKAY. WE'RE GOING TO OVERRUN THE BASE, LEAVING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE INTACT. TAKE ONE PRISONER.
POTTER HERE: YOU MEAN AT LEAST ONE PRISONER?
I REPEAT: ONLY ONE PRISONER.
POTTER, I'M WITHDRAWING YOUR COMMAND. SEND ME CHAVEZ.
OKAY, SERGEANT.
THE RELIEF IN POTTER'S VOICE WAS UNMISTAKABLE.

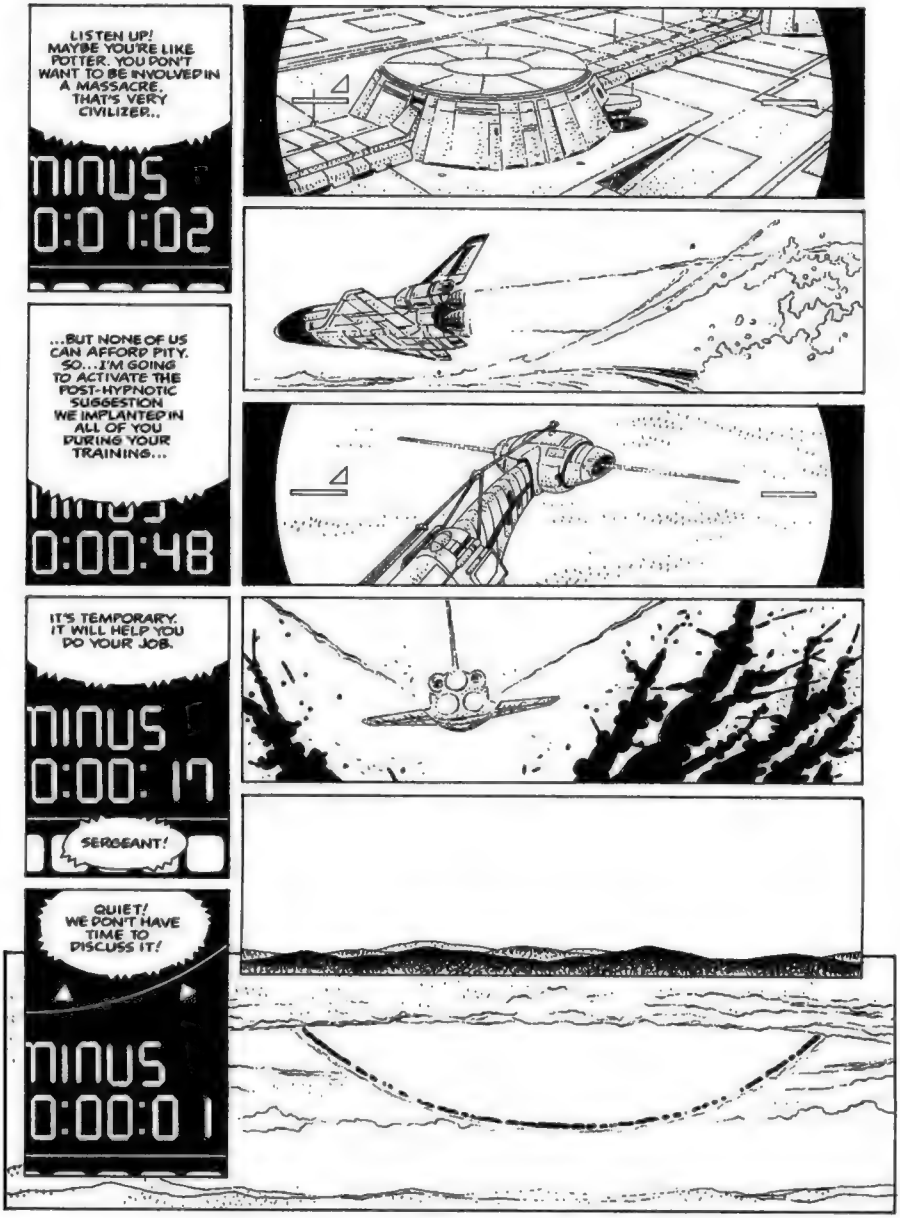
• TO BE CONCLUDED... •

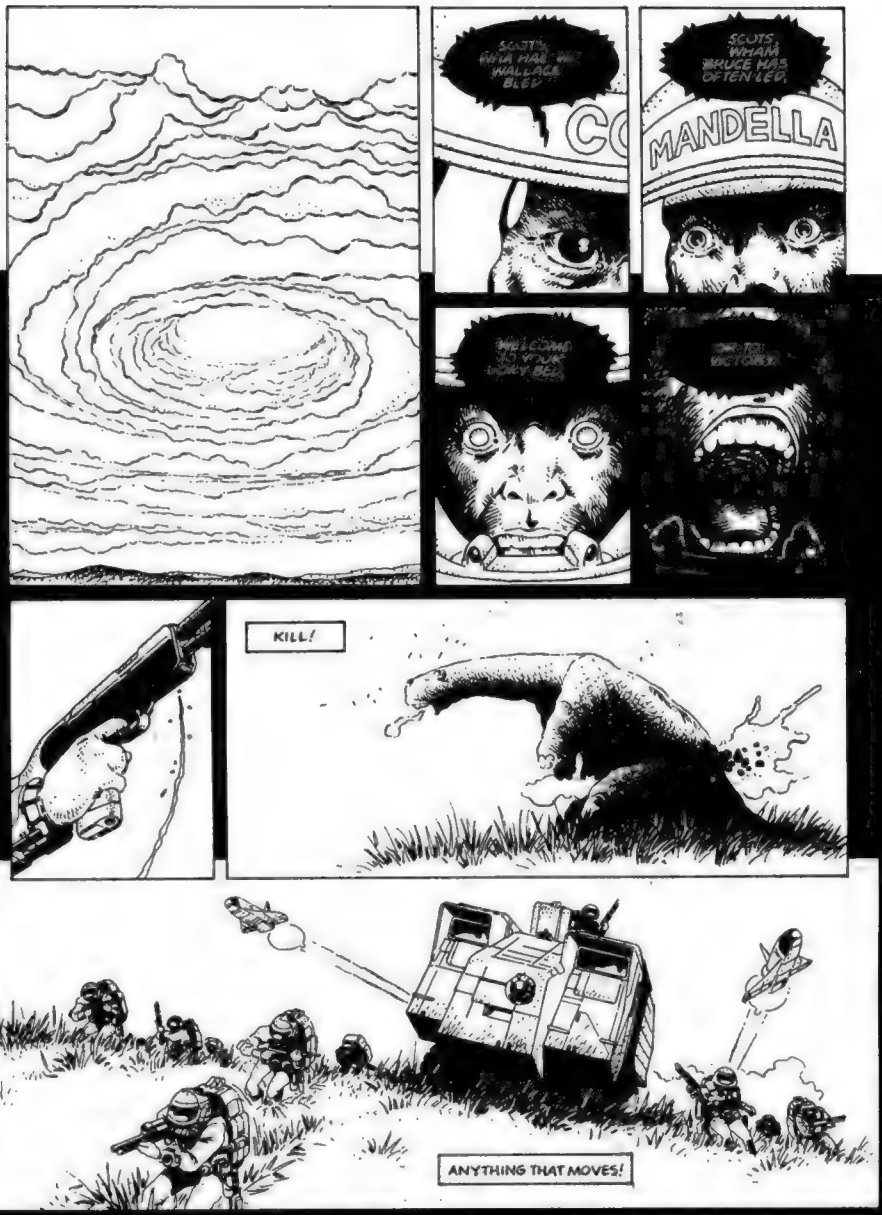
THE FOREVER WAR

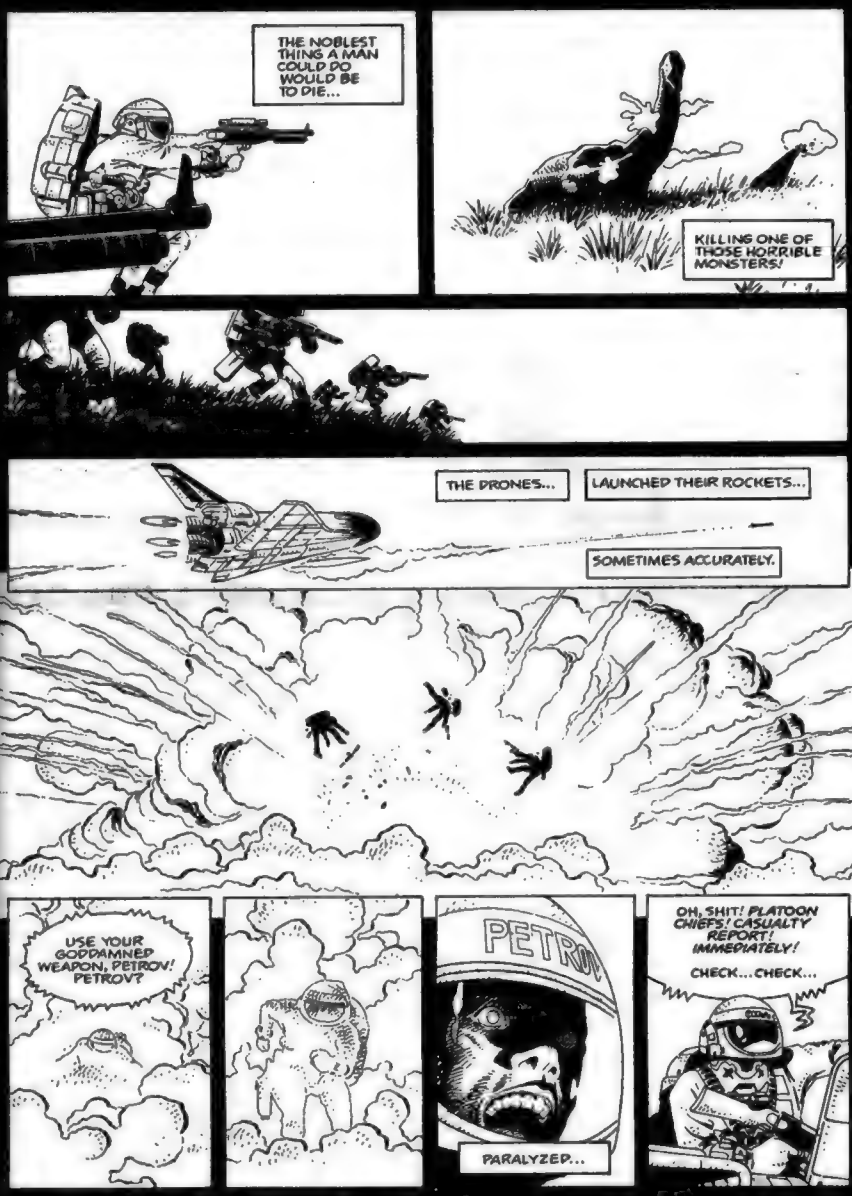
BY
HALDEMAN & MARVANO

BOOK ONE
CHAPTER FOUR

ORTIZ
MANDELLA, CALL IN OUR ROBOT DRONES.
T MINUS
000:01:37


LISTEN UP! MAYBE YOU'RE LIKE POTTER. YOU DON'T WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN A MASSACRE. THAT'S VERY CIVILIZER..
MINUS 0:0 1:02
...BUT NONE OF US CAN AFFORD PITY. SO...I'M GOING TO ACTIVATE THE POST-HYPNOTIC SUGGESTION WE IMPLANTED IN ALL OF YOU DURING YOUR TRAINING...
0:00:48
IT'S TEMPORARY. IT WILL HELP YOU DO YOUR JOB.
MINUS 0:00: 17
SERGEANT!
QUIET! WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO DISCUSS IT!
MINUS 0:00:0 1

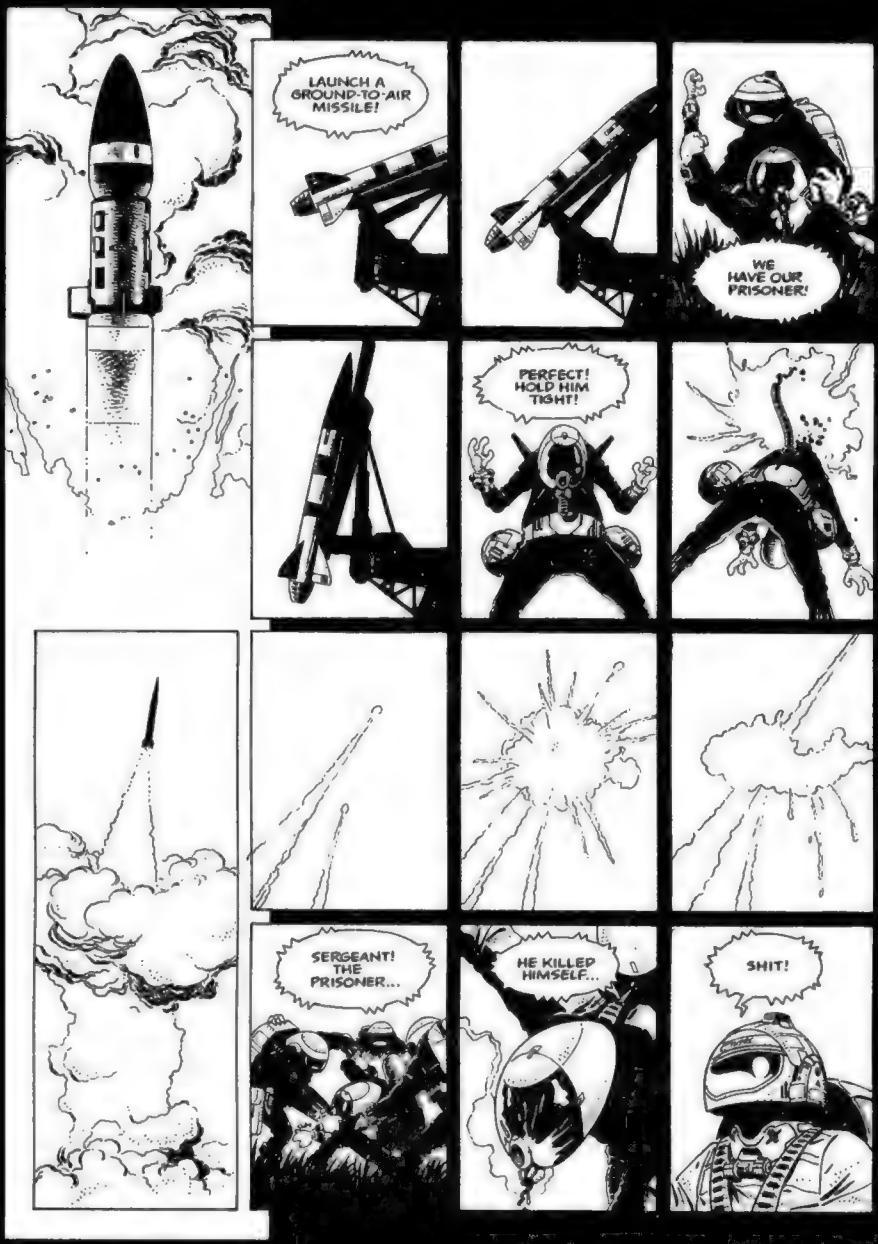

SCOTS WHAM BRUCE HAS OFTEN LED.
MANDELLA
KILL!
ANYTHING THAT MOVES!


THE NOBLEST THING A MAN COULD DO WOULD BE TO DIE...
KILLING ONE OF THOSE HORRIBLE MONSTERS!
THE DRONES...
LAUNCHED THEIR ROCKETS...
SOMETIMES ACCURATELY.
USE YOUR GODDAMNED WEAPON, PETROV! PETROV?
PETROV
PARALYZED...
OH, SHIT! PLATOON CHIEFS! CASUALTY REPORT! IMMEDIATELY!
CHECK... CHECK...

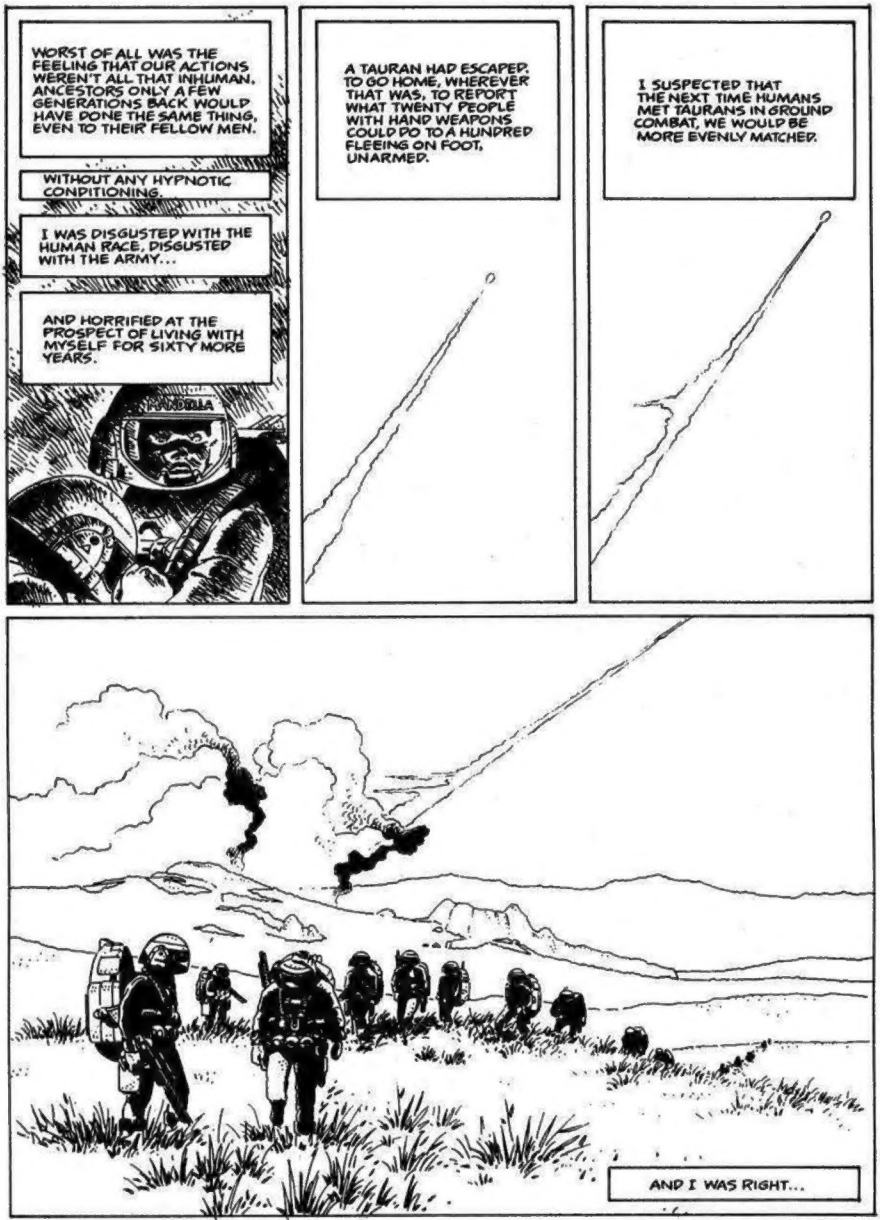
THREE DEAD! GENTLEMEN, LADIES, PLEASE REFRAIN FROM KILLING EACH OTHER!
NO ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENSE...
NOT A HINT OF RETALIATION...
NOT A TAURAN IN SIGHT...
NOTHING!
ATTACK!
HERE THEY COME!
THEY SCURRY IN FRONT OF US, TERRIFIED...
UNARMED...
WITHOUT PROTECTION...
ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT HEMOGLOBIN!
THEY DIDN'T EVEN DEFEND THEMSELVES.

THE ONLY DANGER TO US WAS OURSELVES.

IT WAS A BLOODBATH...
IN SPITE OF THEIR NUMBERS, THEY DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE.
THEIR BRIEF, HOARSE CRIES RESONATED IN MY HELMET...
WHILE WE SLASHED THEM INTO GORY CHUNKS.
CEASE FIRE! CEASE FIRE, DAMN IT!
AND CATCH ME ONE OF THOSE BASTARDS! HE WON'T BITE YOU!
THERE! RUNNING INTO THE BUILDING!
JUST TIME TO...
SPOT HIM, THEN...
GOD! ONE OF THEM IS GETTING AWAY!


LAUNCH A GROUND-TO-AIR MISSILE!
WE HAVE OUR PRISONER!
PERFECT! HOLD HIM TIGHT!
SERGEANT! THE PRISONER...
HE KILLED HIMSELF...
SHIT!

NO TAURAN PRISONER...
THE BIOLOGISTS WOULDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO STUDY...
...EXCEPT A PILE OF DEAD MEAT!
THE HYPNOTIC SUGGESTION ERASED ITSELF...
17
AT FIRST, IT WAS PRETTY GRIM.
SOME PEOPLE, LIKE LUCKY AND MARGAY, ALMOST WENT CRAZY, WITH MEMORIES OF BLOODY MURDER MULTIPLIED A HUNDRED TIMES.
BECAUSE IT WAS MURDER--UNADORNED BUTCHERY.
THE TAURANS HAD NO CONCEPTION OF PERSON-TO-PERSON FIGHTING.
THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH AN EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE, AND WE JUST HERDED THEM UP AND SLAUGHTERED THEM.
THE SECOND ENCOUNTER, REALLY--IF YOU COUNTED THE HERBIVORES.


WORST OF ALL WAS THE FEELING THAT OUR ACTIONS WEREN'T ALL THAT INHUMAN. ANCESTORS ONLY A FEW GENERATIONS BACK WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME THING, EVEN TO THEIR FELLOW MEN.
WITHOUT ANY HYPNOTIC CONDITIONING.
I WAS DISGUSTED WITH THE HUMAN RACE, DISGUSTED WITH THE ARMY...
AND HORRIFIED AT THE PROSPECT OF LIVING WITH MYSELF FOR SIXTY MORE YEARS.
A TAURAN HAD ESCAPED. TO GO HOME, WHEREVER THAT WAS, TO REPORT WHAT TWENTY PEOPLE WITH HAND WEAPONS COULD DO TO A HUNDRED FLEEING ON FOOT, UNARMED.
I SUSPECTED THAT THE NEXT TIME HUMANS MET TAURANS IN GROUND COMBAT, WE WOULD BE MORE EVENLY MATCHED.
AND I WAS RIGHT...

• END BOOK ONE •

"To say that *The Forever War* is the best science fiction war novel ever written is to damn it with faint praise. It is, for all its techno-extrapolative brilliance, as fine and woundingly genuine a war story as any I've read."
—WILLIAM GIBSON, author of *Neuromancer* and *Spook Country*
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